The six paths and four lives are split asunder, as Ogami Itto and Daigoro tumble apart. Sworn enemy Retsudo Yagyu pursues the Lone Wolf to retrieve a secret communiqué stolen from him, only to watch dozens of his men fall victim to Lone Wolf's hungry sword. Father and son must search for one another as their separate paths echo with poetry and quiet tragedy. With Yagyu's henchmen hunting high and low for both of them, the net drags closer and the danger wraps tighter, but the blood flows ever freely. Enter a world where honor and danger are as common as corruption, and the only way out is death.

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— Brian Michael Bendis
writer, **Ultimate Spider-Man, Daredevil**

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LONE WOLF AND CUB

KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

VOLUME 10

DARK HORSE COMICS

LONE WOLF AND CUB

VOLUME 10

HOSTAGE CHILD

By KAZUO KIOKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

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DANA LEWIS

lettering & retouch
DIGITAL CHAMELEON

cover artwork
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HOSTAGE CHILD

子連れ狼

By KAZUO KOIKE
& GOSEKI KOJIMA

VOLUME

10

A NOTE TO READERS

Lone Wolf and Cub is famous for its carefully researched re-creation of Edo-Period Japan. To preserve the flavor of the work, we have chosen to retain many Edo-Period terms that have no direct equivalents in English. Japanese is written in a mix of Chinese ideograms and a syllabic writing system, resulting in numerous synonyms. In the glossary, you may encounter words with multiple meanings. These are words written with Chinese ideograms that are pronounced the same but carry different meanings. A Japanese reader seeing the different ideograms would know instantly which meaning it is, but these synonyms can cause confusion when Japanese is spelled out in our alphabet. *O-yurushi o* (please forgive us)!

LONE WOLF AND CUB

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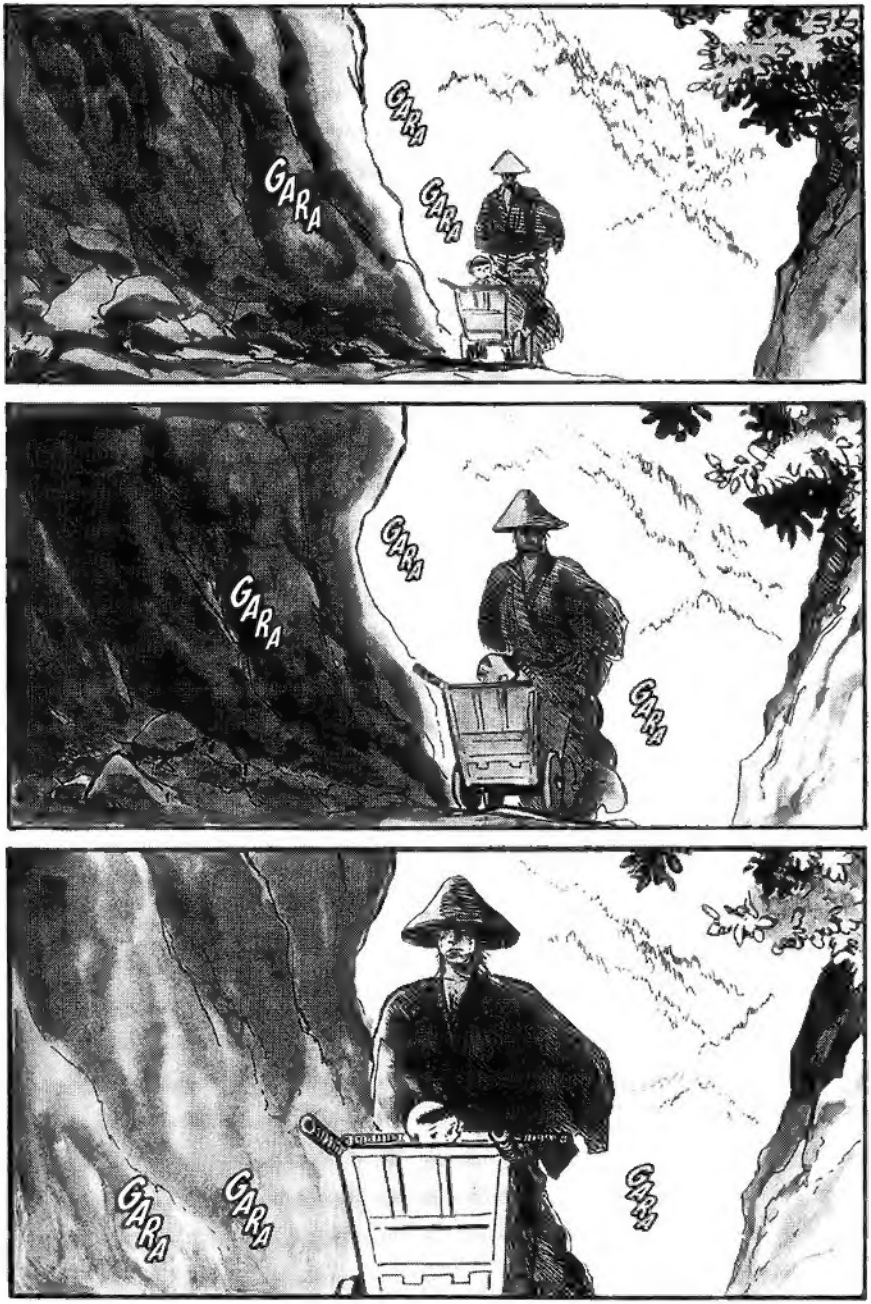
The Yagyū Letter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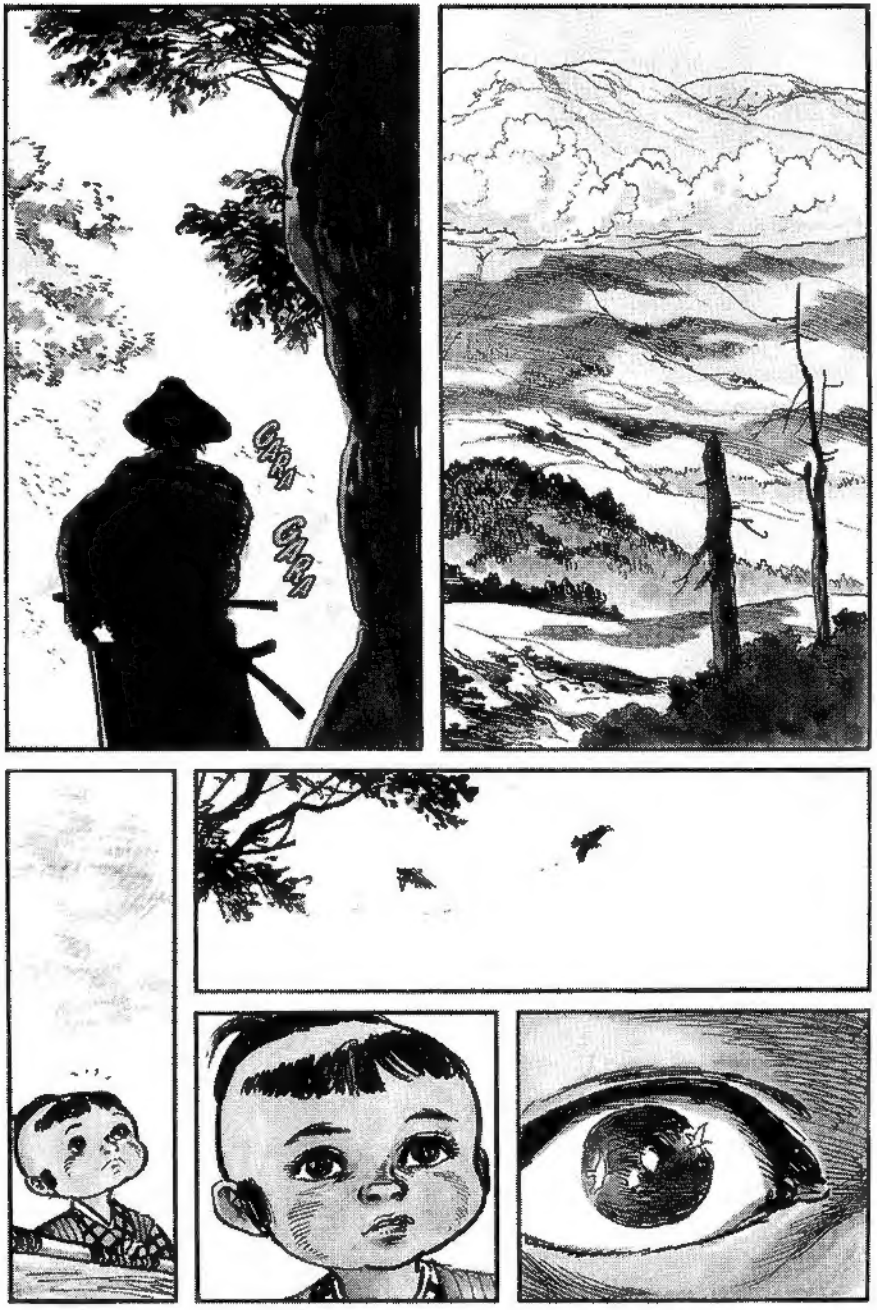
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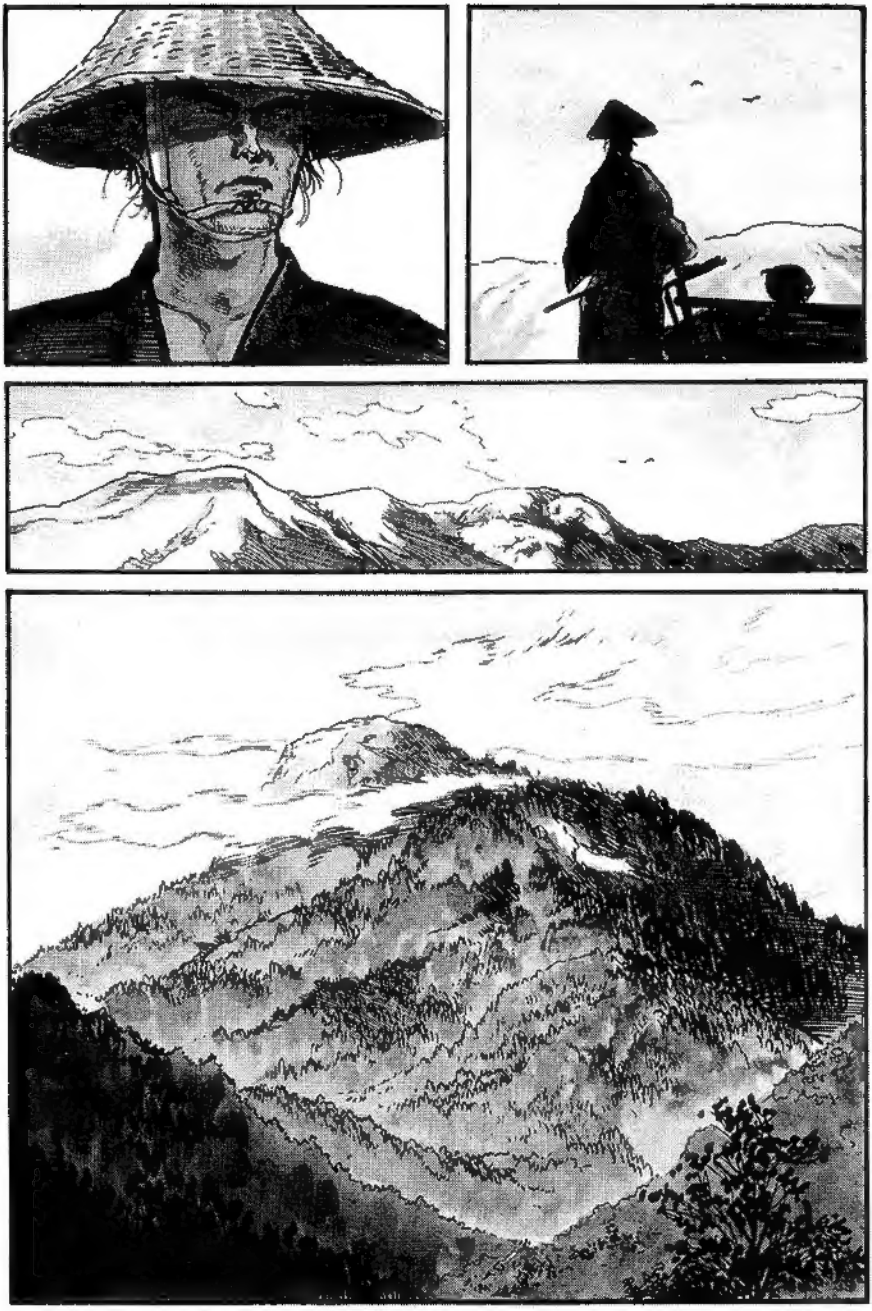
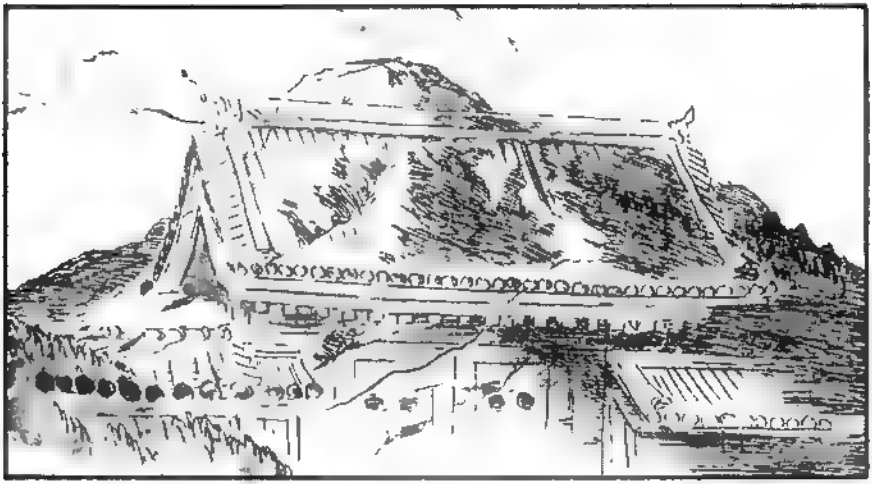
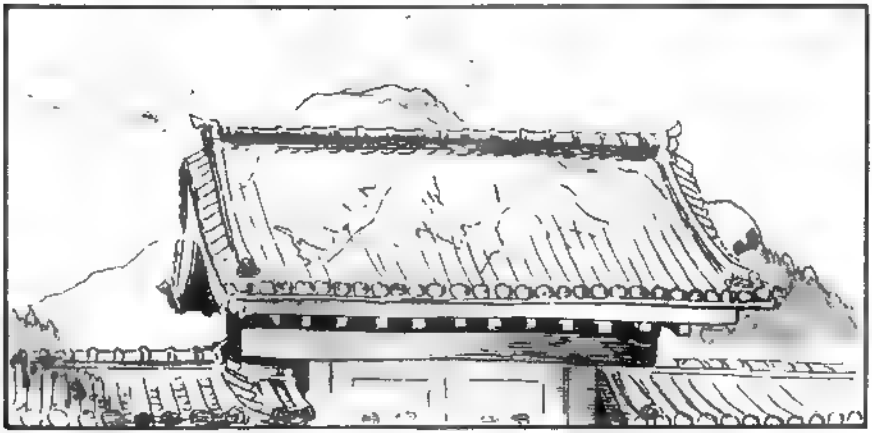
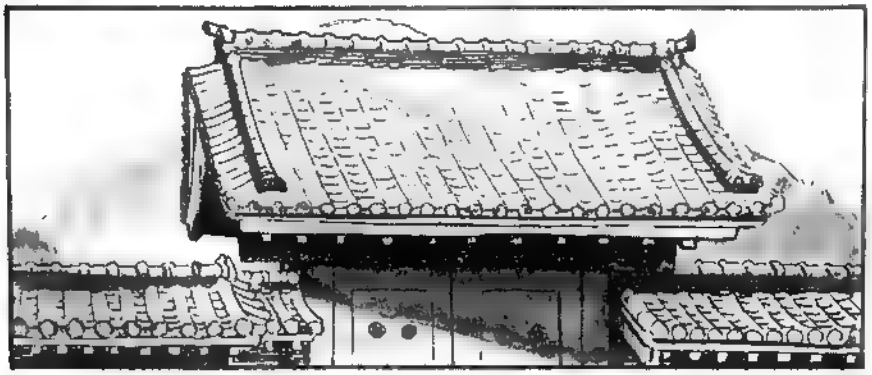


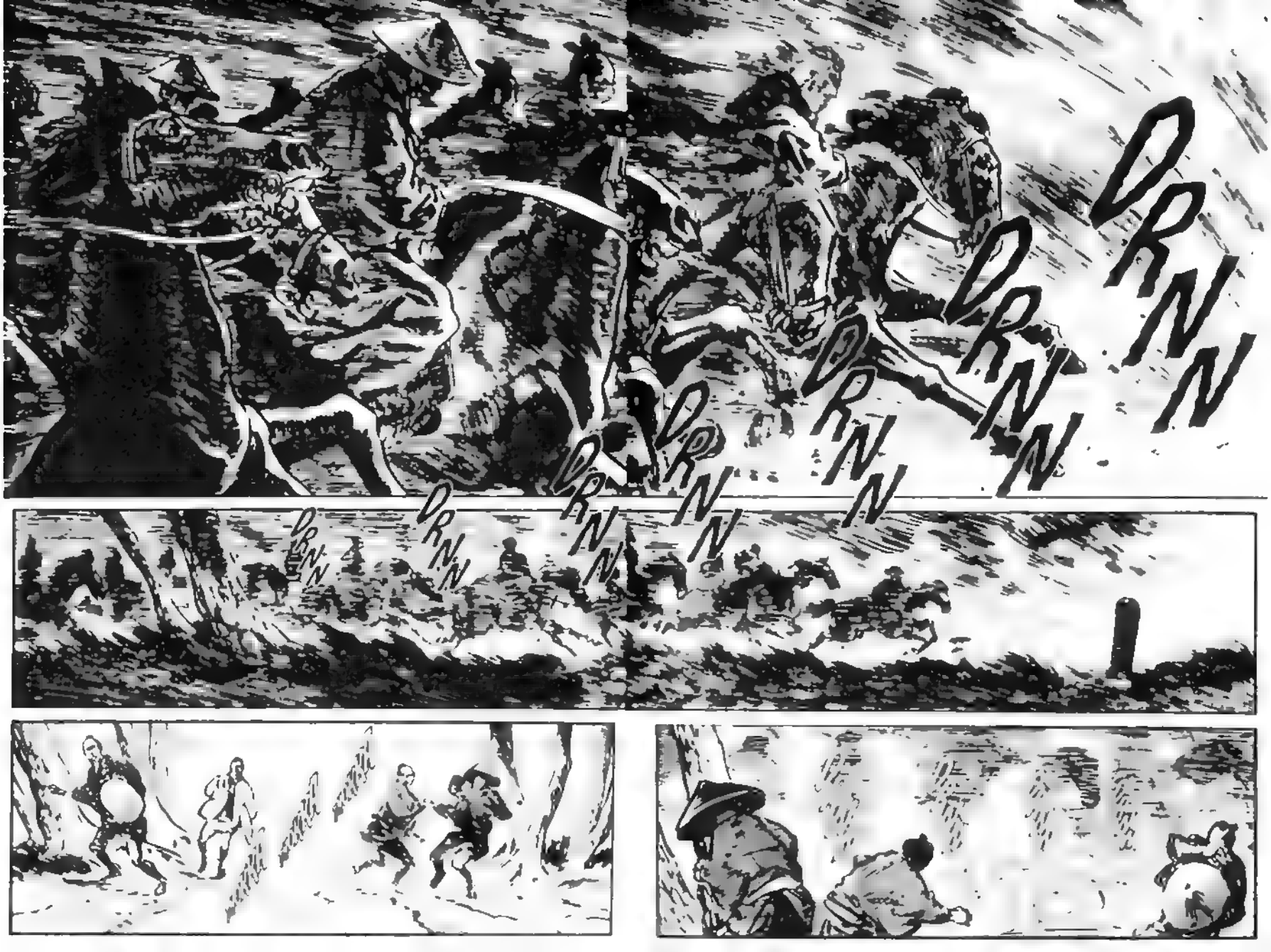






HMPH!
THEY'VE FOUND ŌGAMI ITTŌ!
SADDLE THE HORSES!

DRN
DRN
DRN
DRN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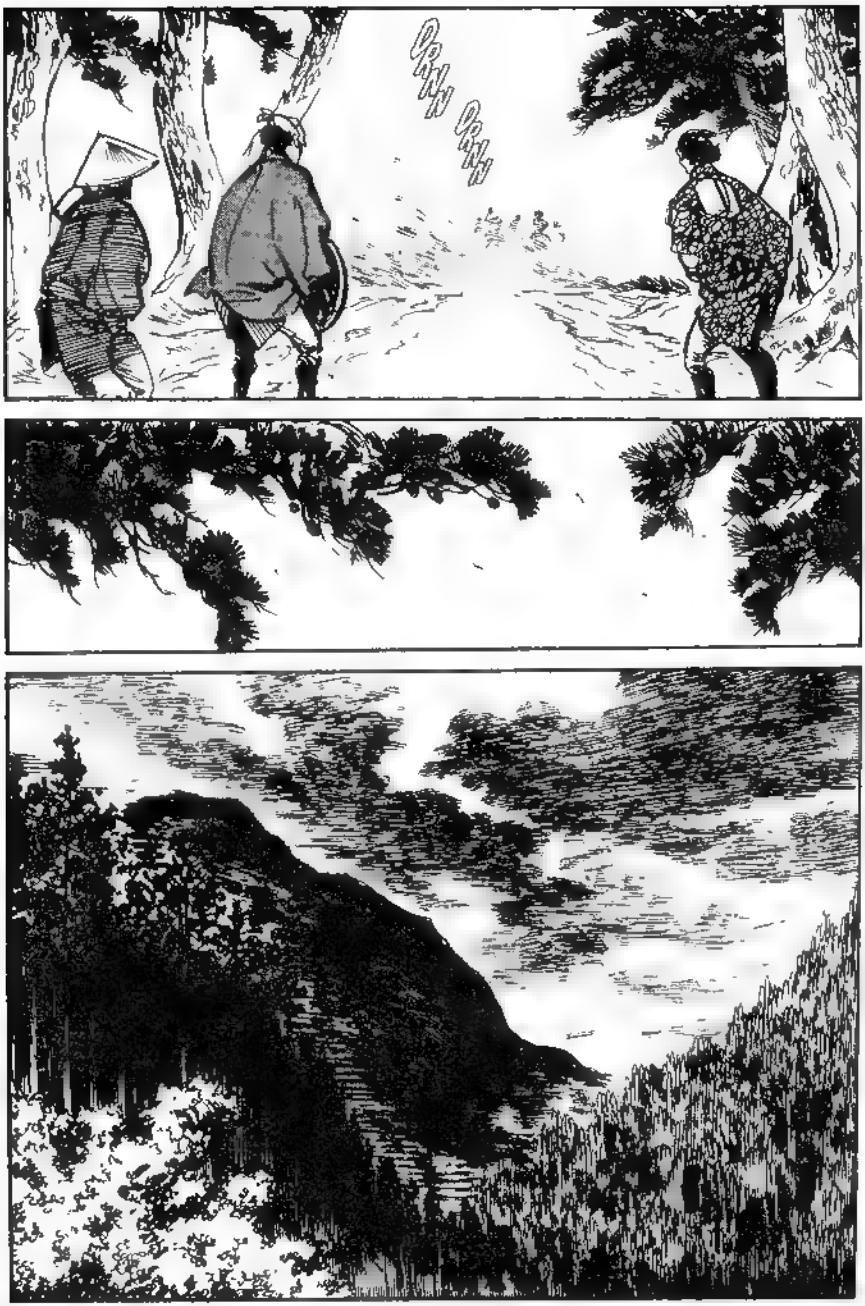

PIN
PIN

*HAKONE SEKISHO
箱根御関所
PIN PIN
PIN
WHO GOES THERE?!

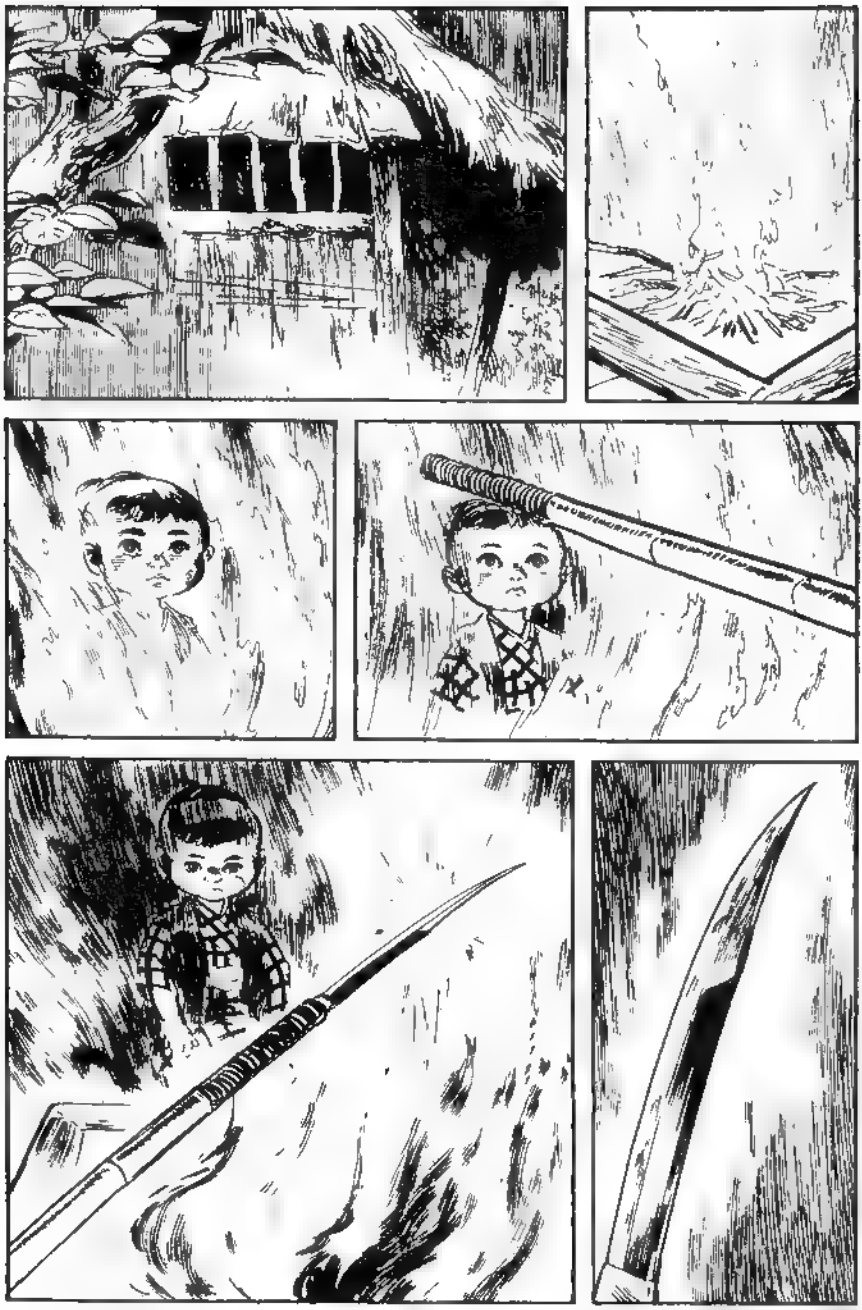
YAGYŪ
RETSUDŌ!

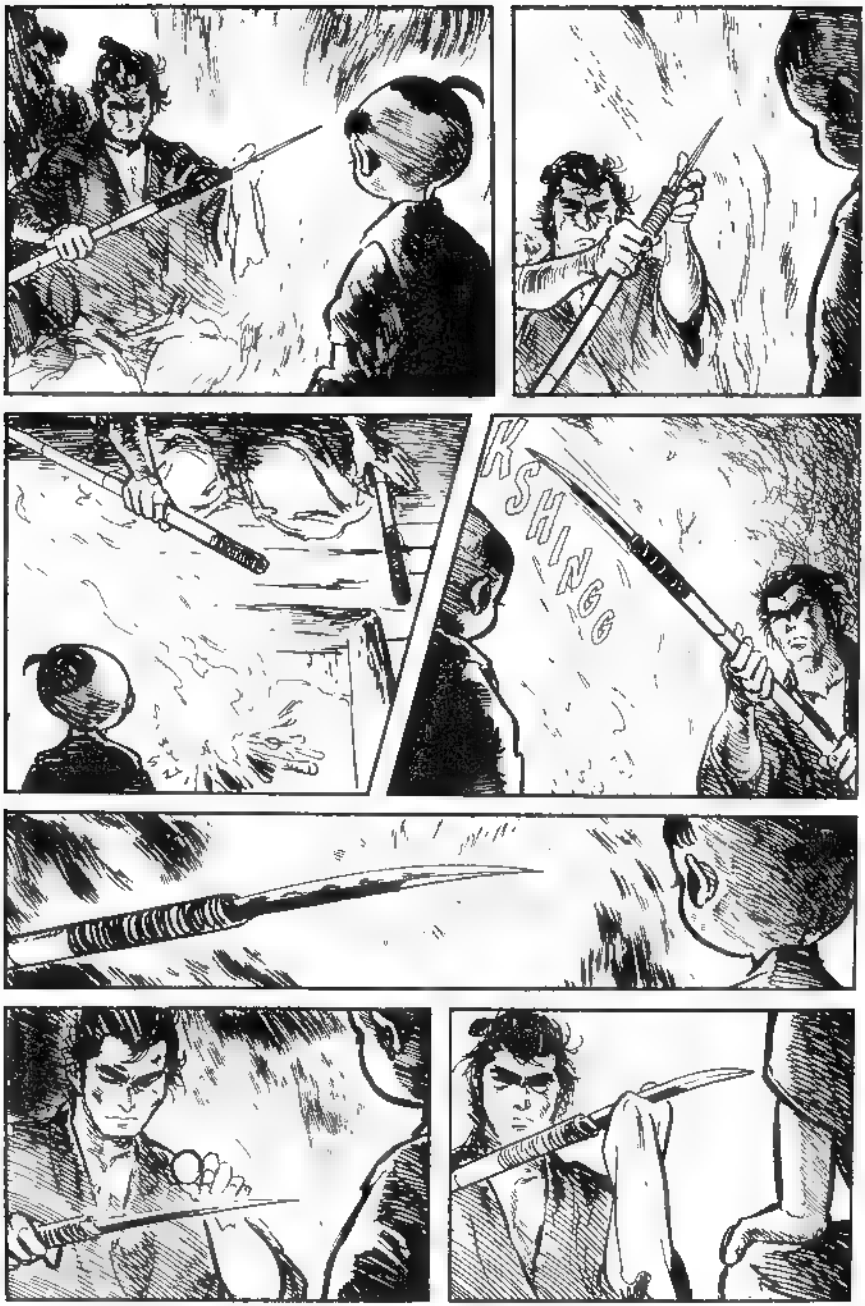
WE'RE
COMING
THROUGH!

DRN
DRN
DRN
DRN
DRN
DRN
DRN

YA-
YAGYŪ
?
WHAT
THE
DEVIL...?

KRAK

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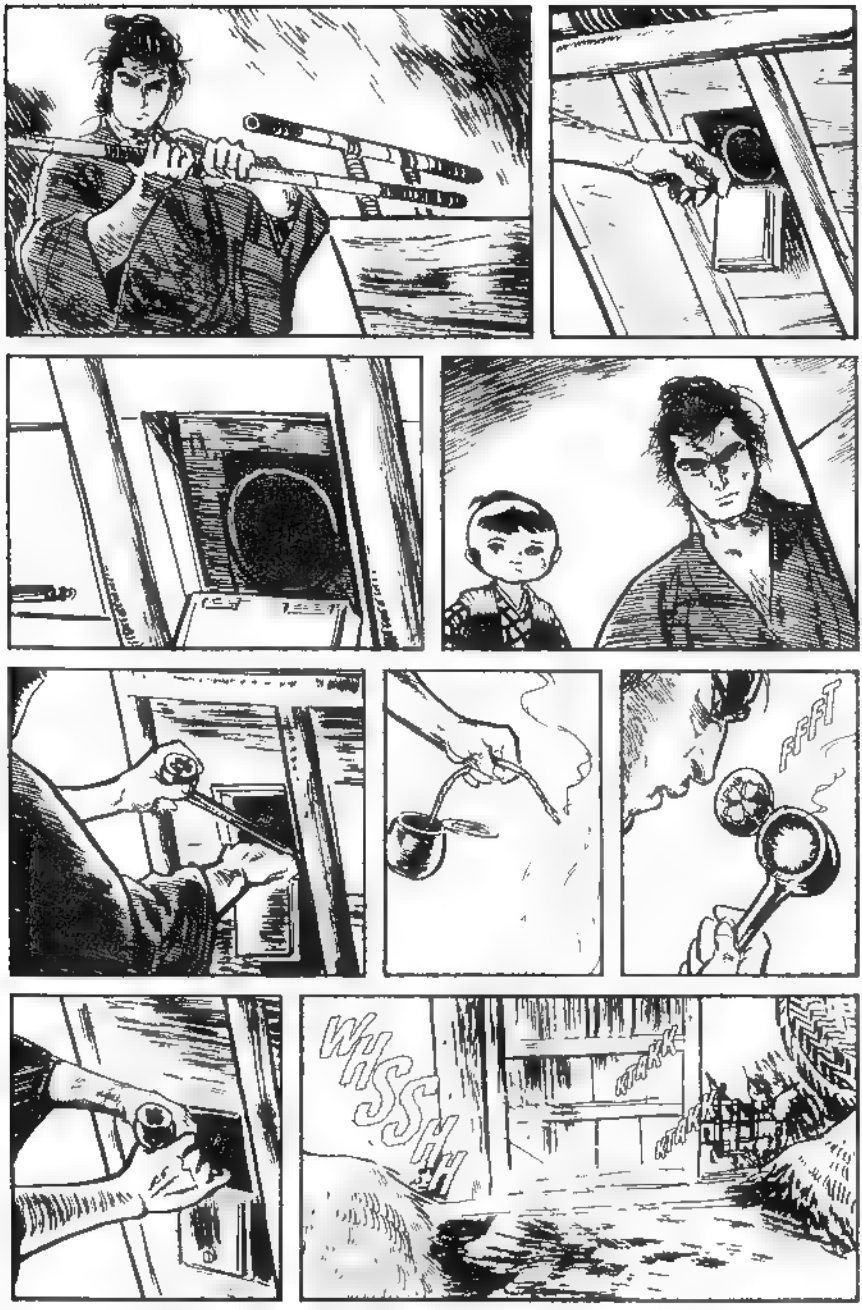
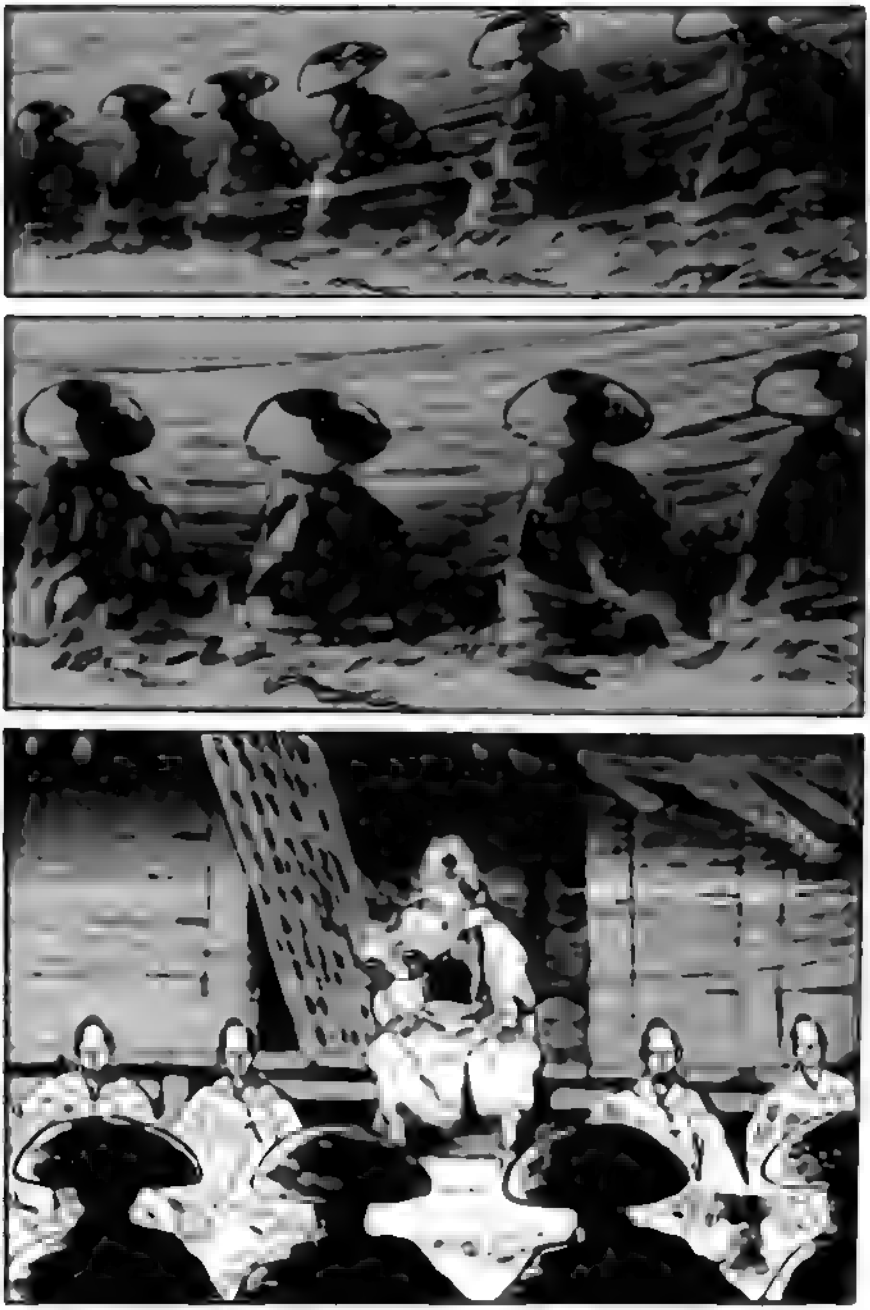
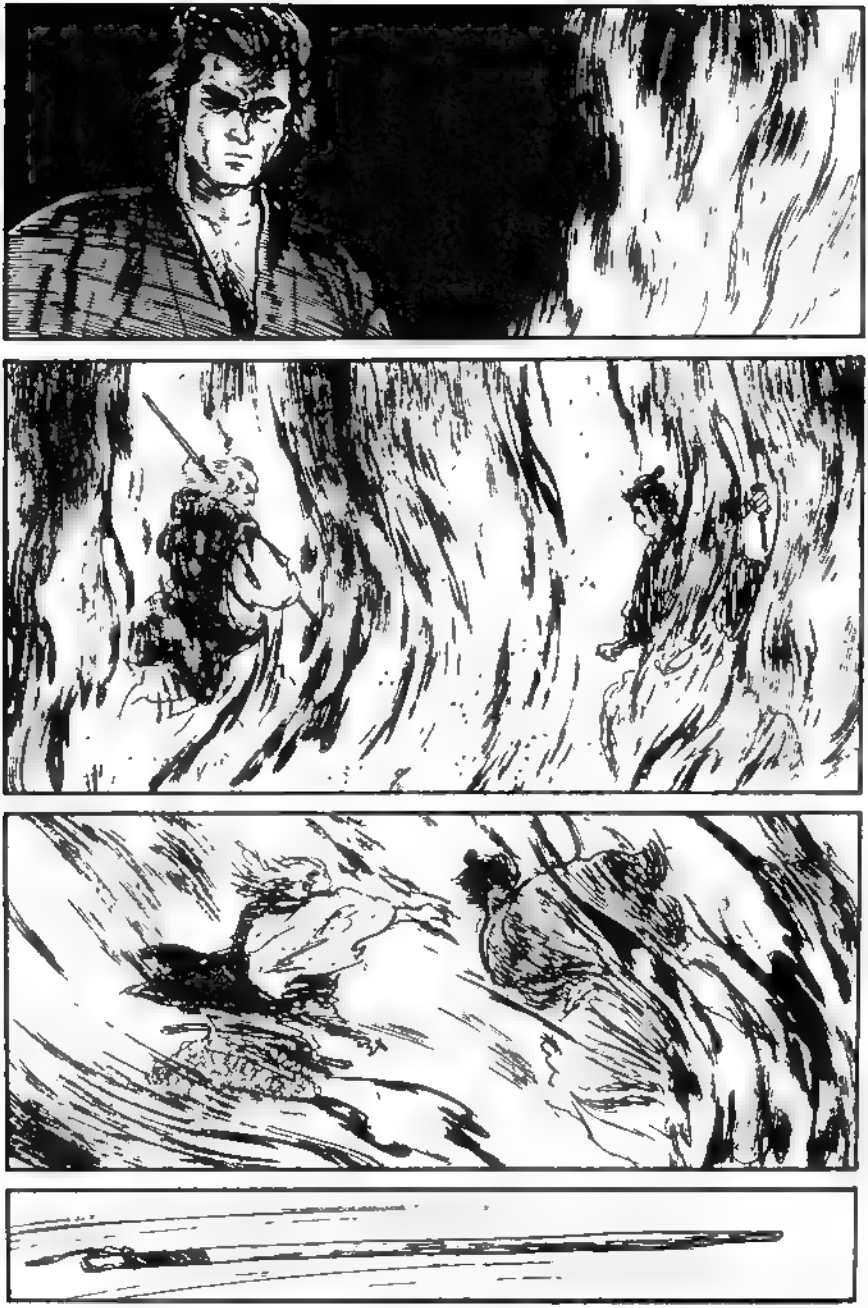

FFFT
WHSSH



WE'VE ESTABLISHED A PERIMETER LINE AROUND ŌGAMI ITTŌ, A RI IN EVERY DIRECTION.
HRM.
MY LORD SUWA AND NUMAZU HAN ARE MOBILIZING THEIR TROOPS WE TOLD THEM THEY'D BE HUNTING DOWN UNRULY RŌNIN
GOOD!
THE FIRST WAVE WILL BE KUROKUWA!
ITTŌ MURDERED YOUR LEADER OZUNU AND MORE THAN TWENTY OF YOUR COMRADES! WE URA-YAGYŪ COULD KILL THE MAN AT OUR PLEASURE BUT THEN WHO WOULD RESTORE YOUR GOOD NAME?
HEAR ME! NOW IS THE TIME FOR THE KUROKUWA TO HAVE REVENGE!!
MY LORD!
GO NOW!

HEH HEH.
CLEVER MOVE, ŌGAMI ITTŌ! YOU PLANNED TO PANIC US INTO ACTION BY STEALING THE GOJŌ-BAKO IF YOU AND THE YAGYŪ BATTLE TO THE DEATH, RUMOR WILL SPREAD.
AND YOUR CASE WILL REACH THE EARS OF THE SHŌGUN HIMSELF IS THAT YOUR SCHEME?

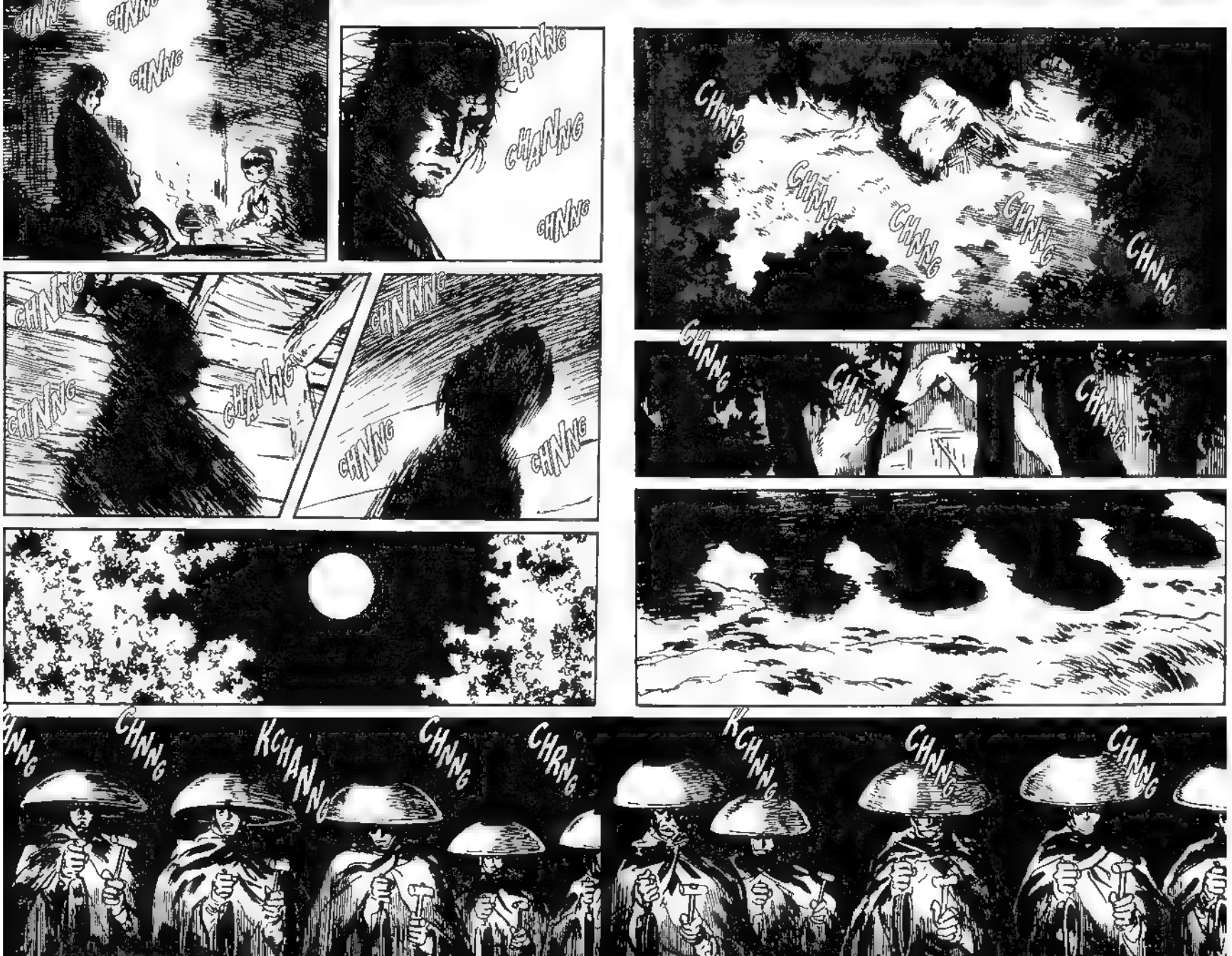
BUT THAT ONLY WORKS AMONG EQUALS, ITTŌ!
WHAT CAN A HOMELESS ASSASSIN WITH A CHILD IN HIS ARMS DO TO THE YAGYŪ? EVEN IF YOU SURVIVE THE KUROKUWA, HOW CAN YOU DEFEAT THE ARCHERS AND RIFLE BRIGADES OF SUWA AND NUMAZU?!
YOU'RE A PITIFUL JOKE, ITTŌ! THE YAGYŪ CONTROL THE NATION! YOU THINK TO DESTROY US WITH YOUR PAPER SWORD?!
HAHH HAH HAH HAH!



WHAM
HRKK!
TH-THE SECRET OF THE YAGYŪ HIDES IN THE GOJŌ-BAKO! I'VE CHECKED THEM CAREFULLY BUT.
GOJŌ-BAKO COME FROM ALL SIXTY REGIONS OF JAPAN. AT LEAST THREE ARRIVE EVERY DAY
A SECRET CONCEALED IN ALL THOSE LETTERS IS NOT EASILY BROKEN.
THE YAGYŪ HAVE HIJACKED THE SHŌGUN'S COMMUNICATIONS FOR THEIR OWN ENDS. THAT MUCH I HAVE PROVED
THAT'S WHY RETSUDŌ USED YOUR DUEL TO
HRKK!

SUŌ-DONO!
MY MY BLOOD IS YOUR PROOF
WHAT IS HIDDEN IN THE GOJŌ-BAKO ..?
IF WE CAN. FIND THAT...
AN OFFICIAL COMMUNICATION FROM THE KYOTO SHOSHIDAI COMPLETELY NORMAL IN EVERY WAY
WHAT SECRET CAN BE HIDING HERE?
IF EVEN A MASTER LIKE SUŌ-DONO COULDN'T FIND IT, THERE'S NO REASON TO THINK WE CAN DO BETTER
YET AS LONG AS WE HOLD THE LETTER THE YAGYŪ WILL ATTACK
AND WHEN THEY DO
THEN MAY WE FIND LIFE IN DEATH

DAIGORO—
BY STEALING THE GOJŌ-BAKO, WE THREW DOWN OUR GAUNTLET TO THE YAGYŪ. WE STAND AT THE INTERSECTION OF THE SIX PATHS AND THE FOUR LIVES!
CHANG
CHANG
ALREADY?!


CHNNG
CHNNG
CHNNG

THE KUROKUWA SERVE THE SHŌGUN!
YET NOW YOU RUN ERRANDS FOR THE YAGYŪ? PATHETIC
A SHINOBI IS VERSED IN SPYCRAFT AND DEFENSE. A SHINOBI NEVER ATTACKS
EASY TO WEAVE OUR STRATAGEMS AND KILL YOU FROM THE SHADOWS BUT THIS WOULD BRING US NO HONOR
WE ARE HERE TO AVENGE OZUNU AND OUR SLAIN CLANMEN!
AND THUS WE REVEAL OURSELVES AND MEET YOU IN FAIR COMBAT!
FIGHT, ŌGAMI ITTŌ! TASTE THE HATRED OF THE KUROKUWA!
SHING
KCHING
CHING
SHING

IF YOU HADN'T BECOME THE YAGYŪ'S ERRAND BOYS, WE WOULDN'T HAVE TO FIGHT.
YOU HATE THE WRONG MAN.
SEEK VENGEANCE ON THE YAGYŪ!
KUROKUWA FOOLS!
WHAT HONOR WHEN YOU ABANDON THE PATH OF DUTY?!

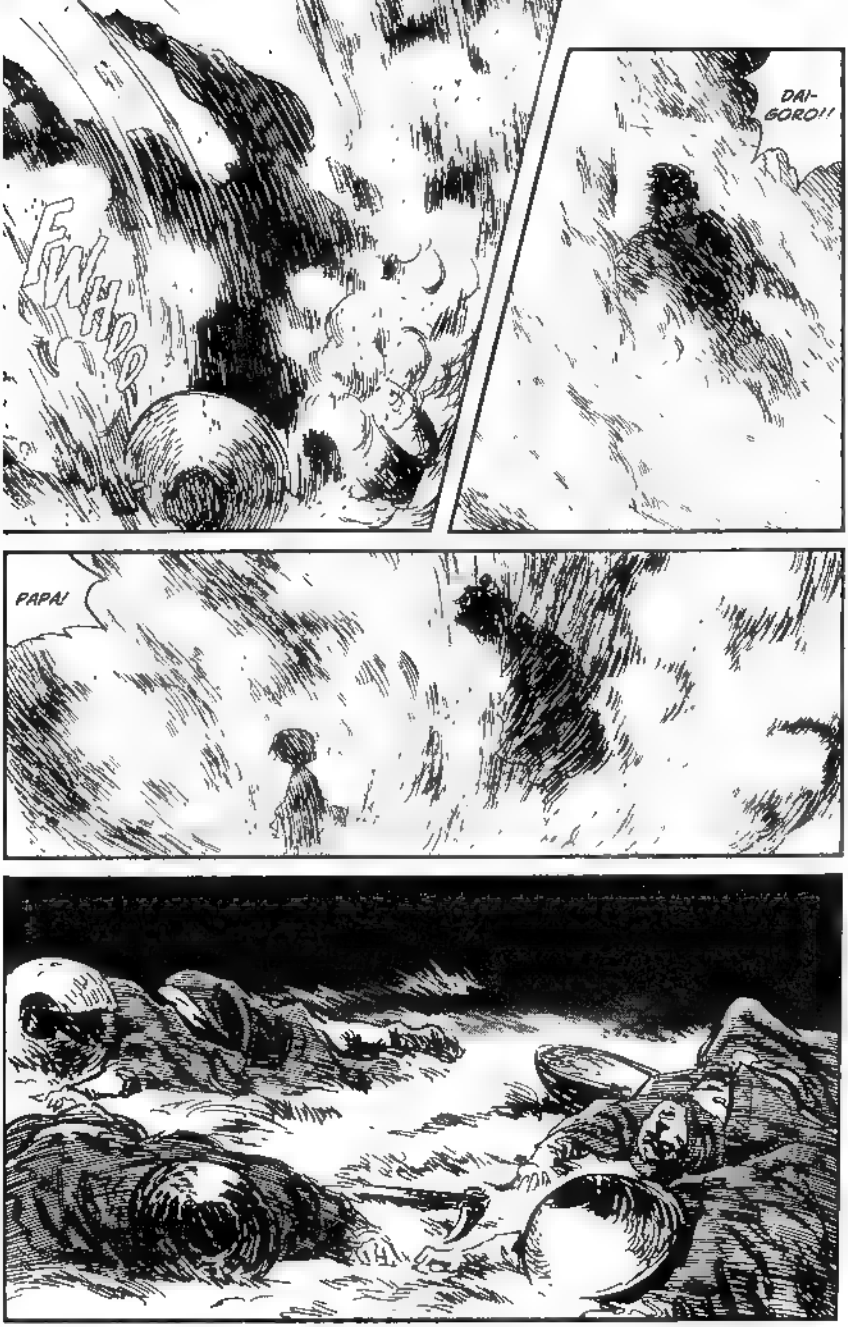
NO MORE QUESTIONS!
HRK!!
GYAAH!

HYAHH!
RUG!
HY-A
AHH!
AHH!
THUK

RRYAHHHH!
GRNH!
HAIII!

SKTCHHH!
NGGYAH!

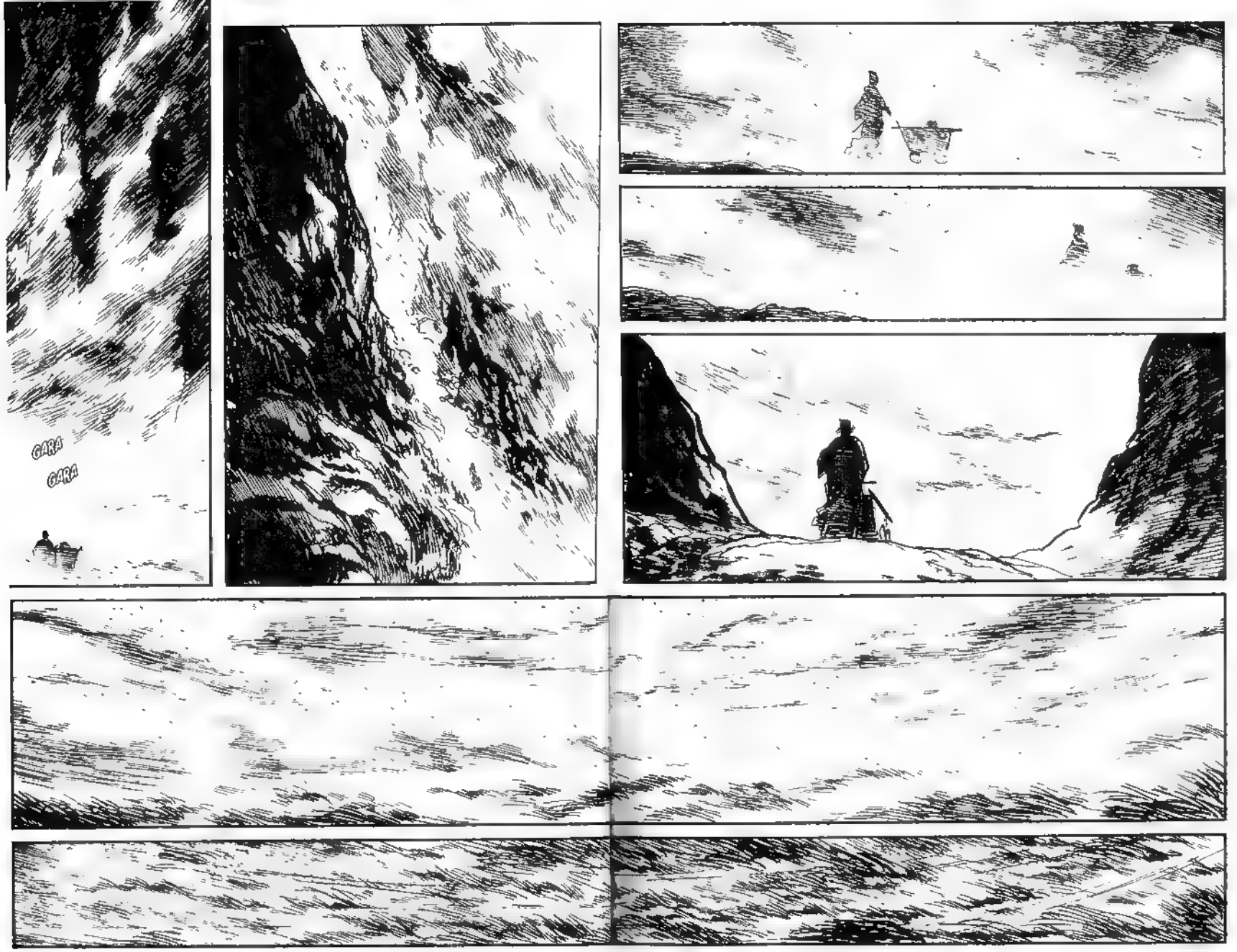
KLAK
KSHUNG
THUK
RRG!


FWHOO
DAI-
GORO!!
PAPA!

GARA
GARA
GARA
GARA
GARA
GARA
GARA
GARA

KUROKUWA FOOLS! MERE SHINOBI, CHALLENGING ITTŌ TO OPEN COMBAT?!
IDIOTS!
THUK
SINCE WHEN HAVE YOU ACTED LIKE SAMURAI, YOU SHINOBI FOOLS!

WE NEED THAT LETTER BACK!
IS THE NEXT STAGE READY?!
IT IS, MY LORD! THE HANSHI OF SUWA AND NUMAZU HAN ARE IN POSITION.
THEN DIE, ŌGAMI ITTŌ!
GARA
GARA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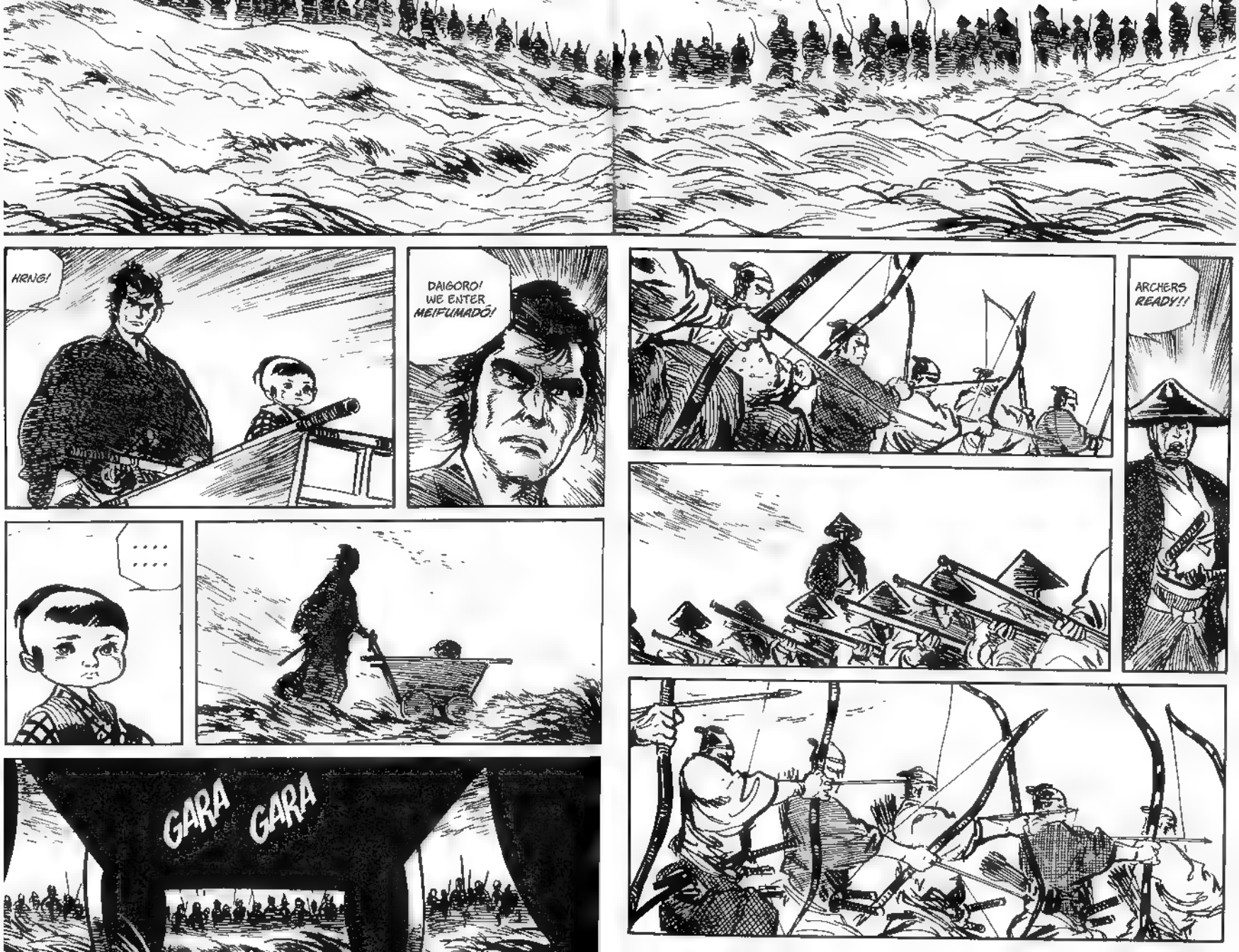
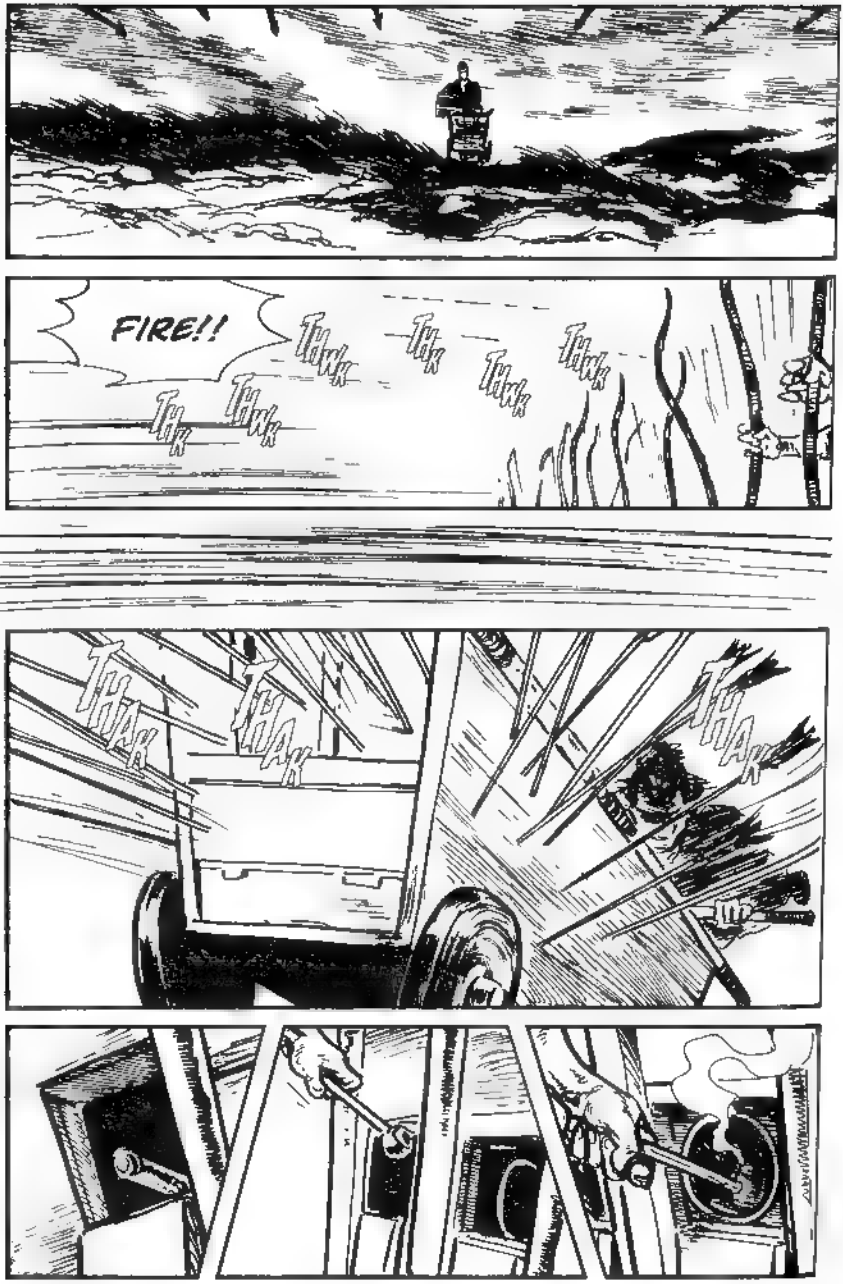
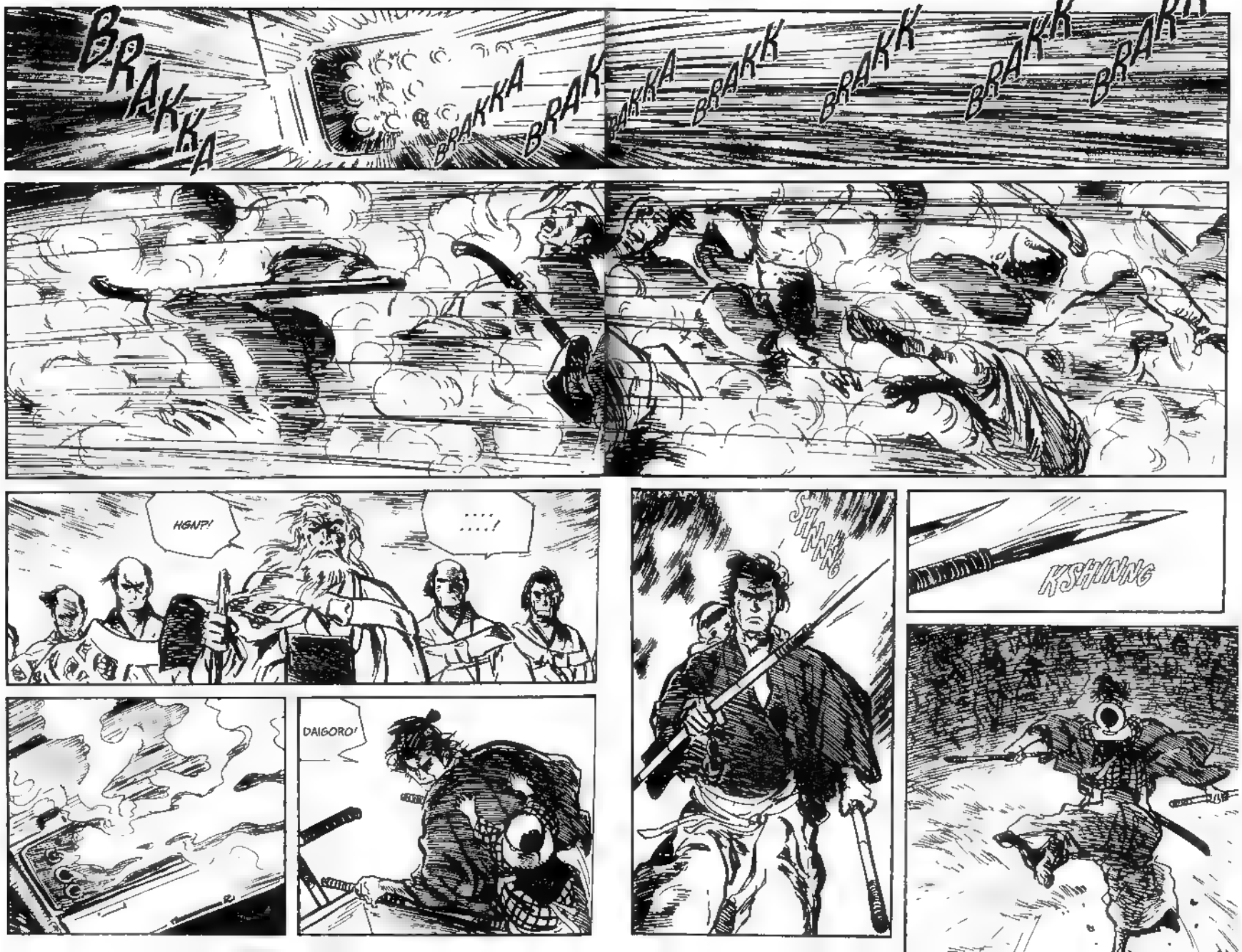
GARA


HRNG!
DAIGORO! WE ENTER MEIFUMADO!
ARCHERS READY!!
GARA GARA


FIRE!!
THWK
THWK
THWK
THWK
THWK
THWK
THAK
THAK
THAK

F-

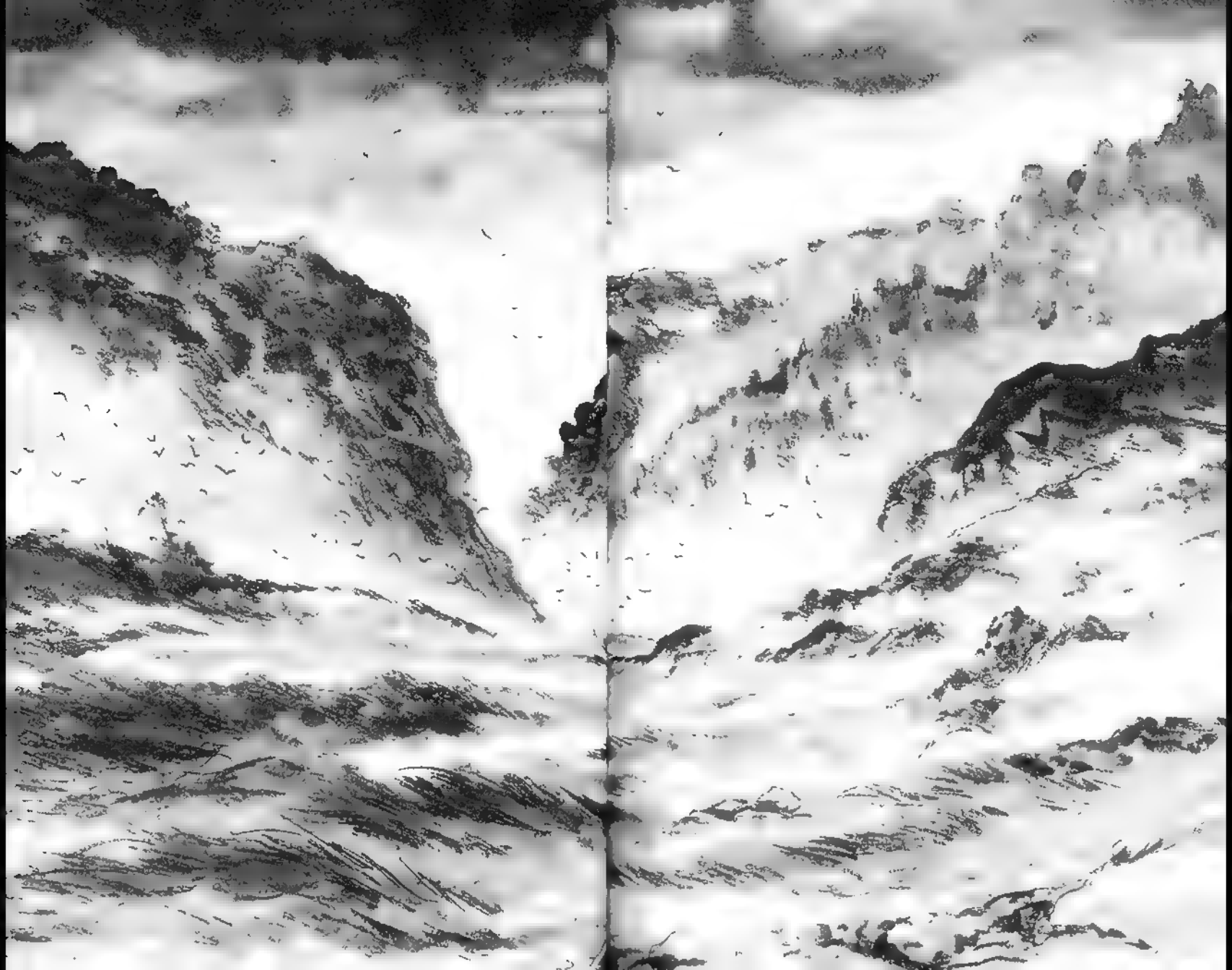

BRAKKA
BRAKKA
BRAKK
BRAKK
BRAKK
BRAKK
BRAKKA
HGNP!
.....!
STNNNG
KSHNNG
DAIGORO!

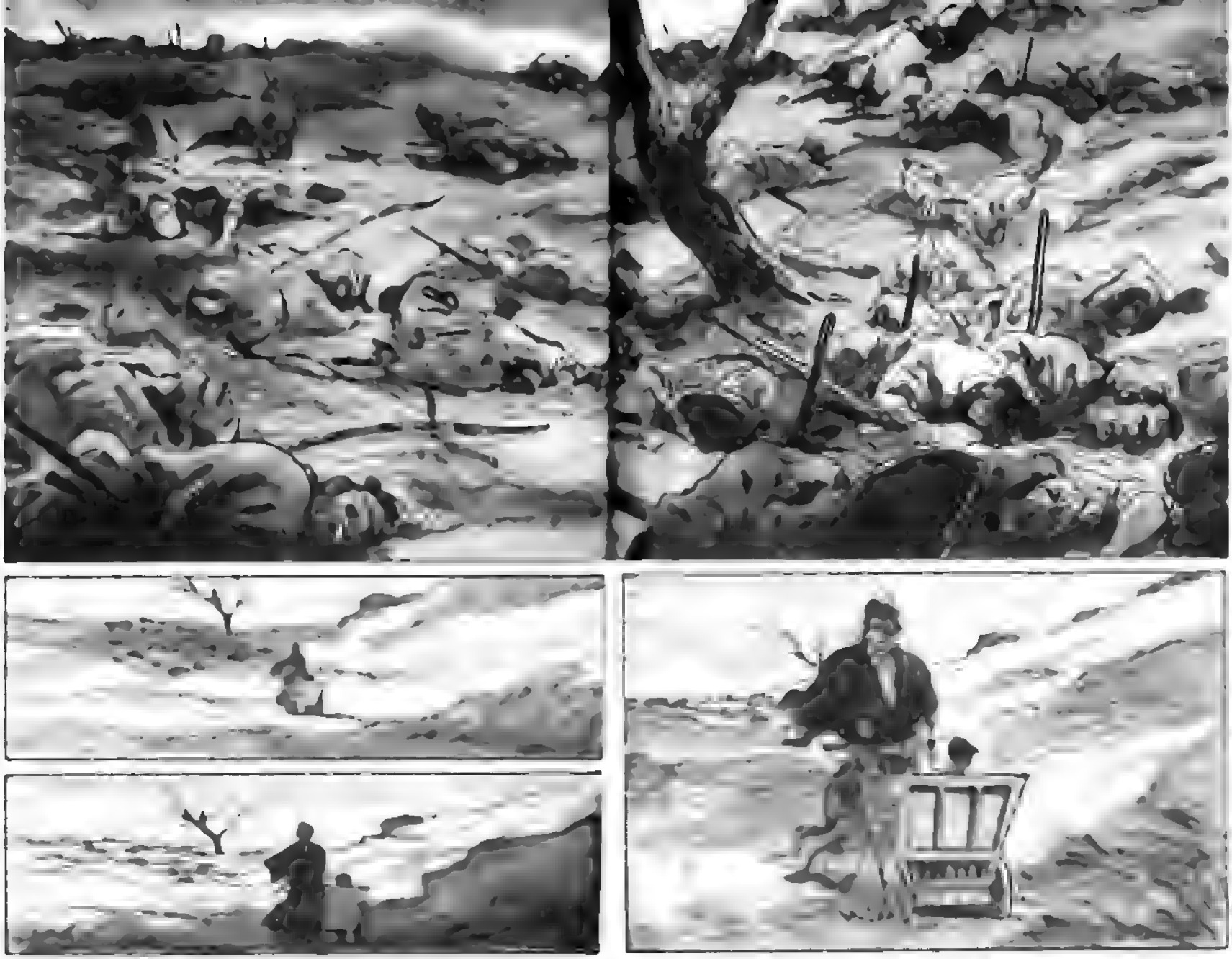
SKRUKK
SKRSSH
SCHOKK
SHUSSH
AAAAH!
HGRK!
AAAAH!
AAGHHH!
GHCK!

RRNG.
LIFE N DEATH
WE LIVE "

the fifty-first

The Tears of Daigoro





WELL DONE
YOU'VE CARVED YOUR PATH OF BLOOD
BUT NOW IT IS AT AN END!
YOUR REPEATING RIFLE IS SPENT, YOUR ZANBATŌ SWORD LOST, YOUR NAGAMAKI SHATTERED, EVEN YOUR DŌTANUKI MUST BE AS NOTCHED AS AN OLD SAW!

WE COME TO BATTLE, ŌGAMI ITTŌ!
THE TIME OF DECISION IS NOW!
ATTACK!

WHSSH
WHT

KSHUNG
FWT
CHUKK
AAUGH

SSSHH
SHRRRRRSH
NGYAAH!

WHOOSSS
SPRK

GYAHH...!!
CHUKK
GHK!
NGKK!

RAWR!
KRSHNG
KRAK
UHFF!

KSSS
GHKK!
UHGAH!
=nahn!=
=hff!=

HRN! RETSUDŌ?!
HOW LONG DOES THIS BEGGAR AND HIS URCHIN INTEND TO LIVE IN SHAME?!
UNTIL I'VE TORN YOU YAGYŪ UP BY YOUR ROOTS
THOUGH WE BECOME DEMONS OF MEIFUMADŌ! THOUGH WE CLAW FLESH AND DRINK BLOOD, REDUCED TO BONE! WE WILL TRANSCEND THE SIX PATHS AND FOUR LIVES!
THEN BE THOSE BONES!
I'LL LEAD THE WAY!

SENDING OUT THE KURO-KUWA!
CALLING UP THE HANSHI OF SUWA AND NUMAZU! WHAT'S THE MATTER RETSUDŌ! DO YOU SO DESIRE YOUR GOJŌ-BAKO?!
....!
I'LL EXPOSE THE YAGYU LETTERS! I SWEAR!

WHSSH
KRAKK
FWHTT

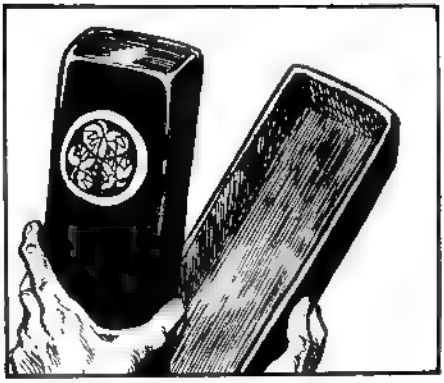
OBSCURE THE DISTANCE, AND STRIKE UP FROM THE WAVES THESE LITTLE GAMES DON'T WORK ON ME!
HEH HEH HEH YOU LURE ME INTO THE LONG GRASS, TO USE IT LIKE WATER FOR YOUR SUIŌ WAVE-SLICING STROKE? HOW AMUSING!
DOES HE COME FROM THE RIGHT OR FROM THE LEFT? IS THAT YOUR GREAT SUIŌ SECRET?

SPHK
SPHK
FWHIT
KRAK

WHAHH!
AHH!

PAPAAAAAAH

THE GOJŌ-BAKO?
IN THE CART, MY LORD!



HRNG! THE DOG!!

FIND IT!O!
THE LETTER MUST BE ON HIM! GO!

OWW!

AAAAAH!!
BORED AGAIN?
AAAAAH
THERE THERE NO TEARS LET'S STOP A WHILE

WHEEEEE
YAAHOOO!

?!
AH?!
OHH?!
MŌSAKU!! WHAT'S WRONG?!

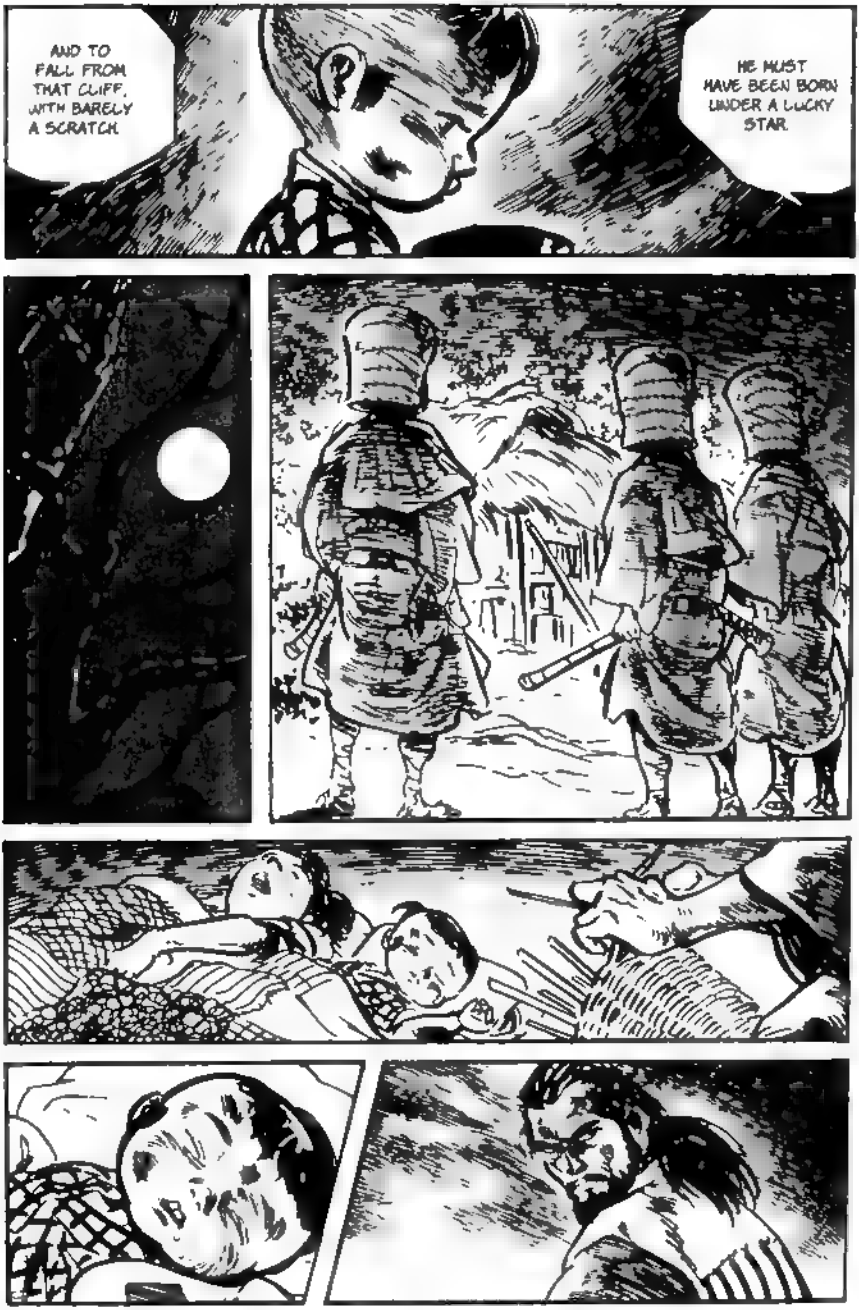
HUG!
HE HE DEAD!
HE DEAD!
NO. HE'S NOT DEAD HE'S OKAY

NOT DEAD.
UMN. NOT DEAD!

PAPA !
PAPA
NNH!
PAPA
...!!!
HOH! YOU'RE AWAKE—GOOD, VERY GOOD

DON'T BE AFRAID.
YOU FELL OFF THE CLIFF WE FOUND YOU AND BROUGHT YOU HERE.
PAPA ...?!
WHOA! STEADY!
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
PAPA ...!!!
CHILD, YOU MUST REST
SO YOUR FATHER ALSO FELL, HMM?

BUT WE CAN'T SEARCH WITH THE SUN DOWN.
WAIT UNTIL MORNING.
DON'T WORRY I *PROMISE* WE SHALL FIND HIM.
....
....
HIS POSTURE, HIS MANNERS. AND THOSE *EYES* HE'S A *SAMURAI* CHILD
STILL, I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY HE ONLY CALLS FOR HIS FATHER
HE ANSWERS NO QUESTIONS. HE SAYS NOTHING MORE. HE'S BEEN THROUGH SOMETHING *TERRIBLE* INDEED .


AND TO FALL FROM THAT CLIFF, WITH BARELY A SCRATCH.
HE MUST HAVE BEEN BORN UNDER A LUCKY STAR.

PARDON!
WHO IS IT?
TRAVELLERS. LOST ON THE ROAD
WE SEEK SHELTER
VERY WELL
IT'S A POOR PLACE, BARELY ENOUGH TO KEEP OFF THE NIGHT DEW. BUT YOU ARE WELCOME TO SHARE IT
OUR THANKS

FORGIVE ME, BUT WHY THIS MOUNTAIN HUT?
YOUR BEARING SAYS YOU ARE NO WOODCUTTER
A RŌNIN, PERHAPS?
IT MUST BE SIX YEARS OR MORE SINCE I ABANDONED THE SAMURAI LIFE.
NOW I CUT WOOD, FASHION BAMBOO IMPLEMENTS, AND GATHER THE MOUNTAIN VEGETABLES YOU NEED NOT TREAT ME OTHERWISE
YET WHY WOULD SUCH A NOBLE MAN AS YOU..?

I HAVE A . HURTING CHILD
HE CAME INTO THIS WORLD CLOUDED IN MIND HE COULD NOT POSSIBLY UPHOLD THE FAMILY LINE. YET SO SAYING, IT WAS HIS PARENT'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR FATHERING HIM.
THE POOR THING..
WHEN WE LIVED IN TOWN, THE NEIGHBOR CHILDREN MOCKED HIM MERCILESSLY HE WAS IN TEARS MORNING TO NIGHT EVEN TODDLERS CALLED HIM "MUDDLED MŌSAKU."
HERE WE COULD LIVE IN PEACE, FATHER AND SON. I BEGGED LEAVE FROM MY LORD, AND MOVED TO THE MOUNTAINS.
A PARENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE LIFE OF HIS CHILD. THIS IS NATURE'S WAY

YET IS IT NOT DISLOYAL TO PLACE YOUR CHILD AHEAD OF SERVICE TO YOUR LORD?
OUR HAN IS DESPERATELY POOR.
BY TAKING LEAVE AND FORFEITING MY ANNUITY, I REDUCED MY LORD'S FINANCIAL BURDENS.
NOR WILL I LIVE FOREVER.
WHAT IS MORE DISLOYAL THAN HANDING MY DUTIES TO SUCH A SON?
I SEE.
AND THAT BOY?
YOU KNOW FAR BETTER THAN I!
FROM THE MOMENT YOU ENTERED, YOU'VE POURED YOUR BLOODLUST UPON HIM.

AND THUS I TOLD YOU THE STORY OF MY LIFE *UNASKED*
HRNG..!
IF YOU HAVE GLEANED MY *FEELINGS* THEN I MUST ASK YOU TO LEAVE PEACEFULLY
IT IS THE *DUTY* OF ONE WHO FINDS A CHILD TO RETURN HIM TO HIS *PARENTS*
HEAVEN HAS PLACED HIM IN MY CARE.
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
THE *SAKKI* YOU TURN ON THIS LITTLE CHILD IS *UNNATURAL*.
AS ONE WHO *LIVES* FOR HIS SON, I *CANNOT* STAND ASIDE

IF YOU TRY TO HARM THE BOY, I WILL FOLLOW THE WILL OF HEAVEN I WILL DEFEND HIM!
SNAP

GET HIM!
SO BE IT! KILL HIM!
YOU...!

SHWIKKK
SSST
MŌSAKU! TAKE THE BOY AND RUN!
UHH.. UHH..
WAAAH! DA-DA!

LISTEN TO ME, MŌSAKU! PROTECT HIM!
UH, UHH!!
AAAH !
DAMN YOU!
WAAH!
RRNG!
HYAHH!

And I'm...
AHAH!
UNGAHH!

HRNG!
SHUKKK
HAKK!
MÔ
MÔSAKU!!!

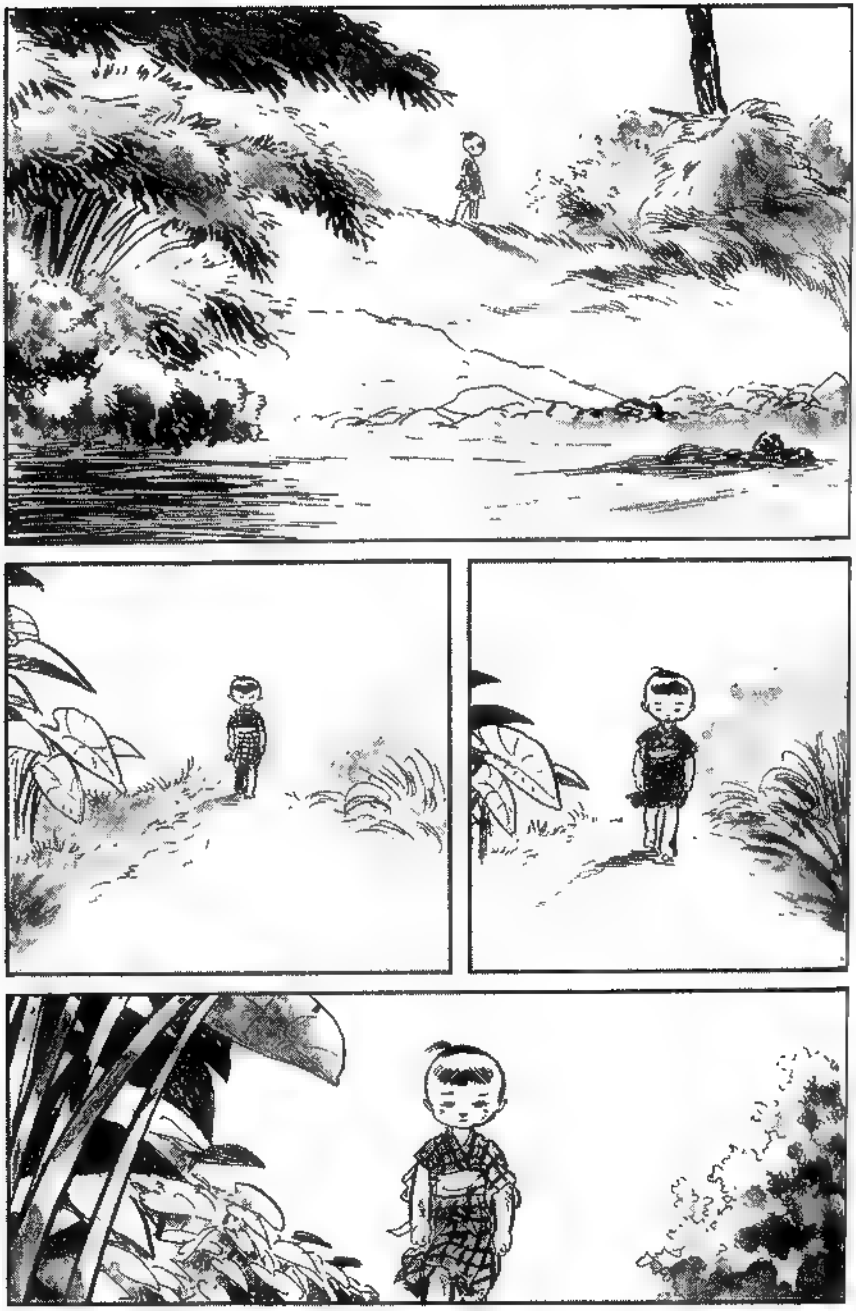
WAAAAHH!!
AHHHNNN!
ALWAH!
UHH! UHHH!
MOVE, BRAT!!
NUHHNNN!!

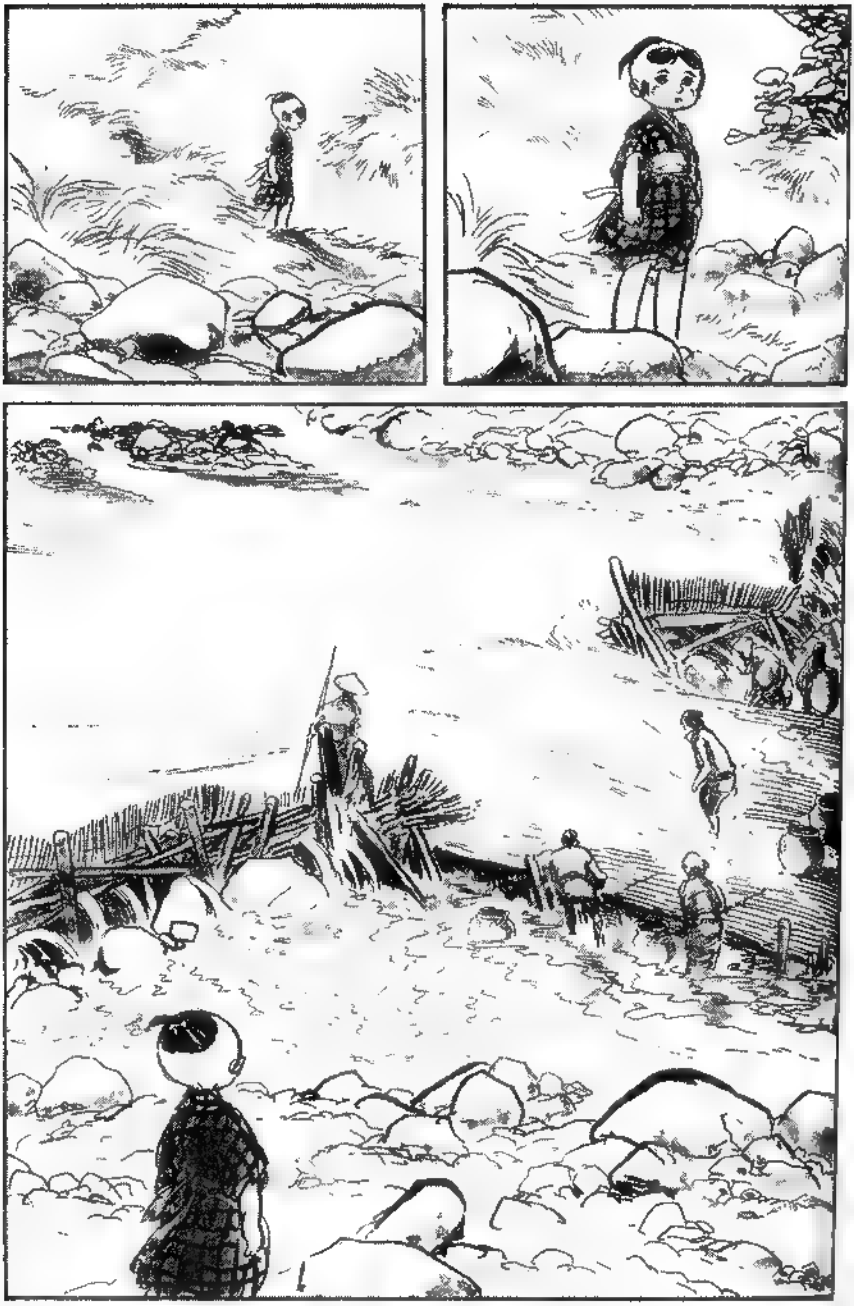
DOG!!
AH!
AHHH!
EEEYAHHH!
HE WAS A CHILD WHO KNEW NO TEARS.

A CHILD WITHOUT WORDS WHO SHOWED NO FEELINGS
A CHILD OF DESTINY, TRAGICALLY ADAPTED TO THE WORLD OF SLAUGHTER IN WHICH HE LIVED
HE DID NOT CRY BECAUSE HE WAS ALONE.
THE CHILD
DID NOT CRY BECAUSE HE WAS AFRAID
FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE HIS BIRTH HE CRIED IN SORROW

the fifty-second

The Fisher-woman's Love





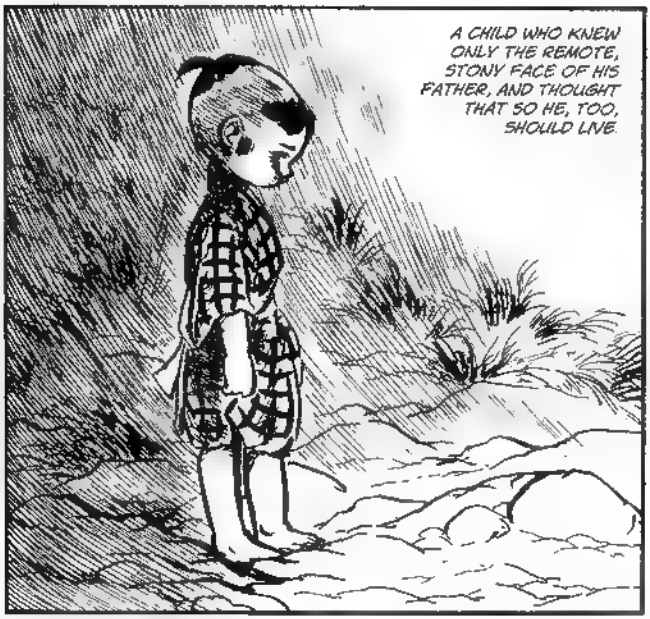
HE HAD EATEN NOTHING FOR A DAY AND A HALF
WATER NOTHING MORE
LORDY! WHOSE LITTLE ONE IS HE?
NOON THE FIFTH NOON SINCE HE HAD LOST HIS FATHER

HERE.
COME HERE.
WHERE YE BE FROM, SWEETIE?
BE YE FROM SHIMO-IDA ?
KAMI-IDA...?
DON'T LOOK LIKE NO LOCAL KID.
WHY'S HE ALL ALONE?
MAYBE HE'S LOST?

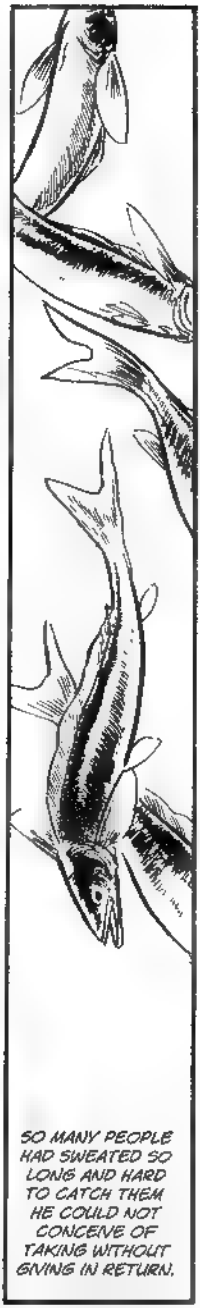
WHERE'S YOUR PA GOT TO, SWEETIE?
....
....
YOUR MA...?
WELL, THEY'RE WORRIED SICK FOR CERTAIN. LAND, LOOK AT HOW DIRTY YE BE!
TUMMY EMPTY, MM?
HERE- HAVE THESE.
COME ON!
....
....
NOW THERE'S AN ODD ONE. WON'T SAY NOTHIN' HUNGRY AS A STARVIN' PUP, BUT WON'T TAKE NO FOOD
MAYBE HE CAIN'T TALK?
IMAGINE LEAVING A CUTE TYKE LIKE HIM ALONE? WHAT AWFUL FOLKS! WHERE'S HE FROM, I WONDER?

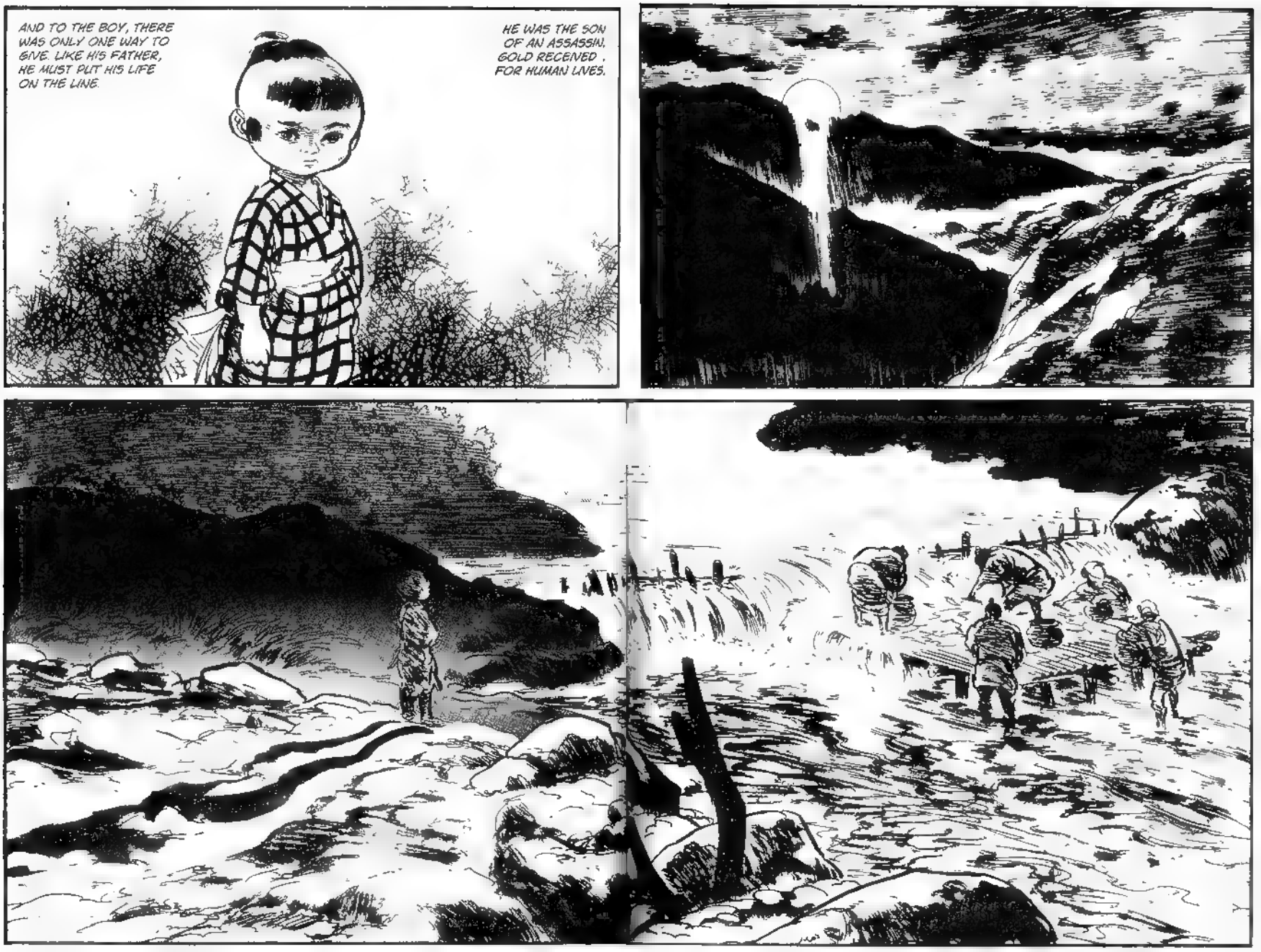
SO READY FER ANOTHER GO?
YUP GUESS WE GOTTA!

WHAT COULD HE POSSIBLY TELL THEM. .? THAT HE LIVED IN A WORLD OF SLAUGHTER. ? THAT HE SEARCHED FOR A FATHER PURSUED BY THE FLASHING BLADES OF THE YAGYU. ..?
THERE WAS NO WAY HE COULD SPEAK . NO WAY HE COULD ANSWER.
HE WAS STARVING... AND YET HE WAS A BOY WHO HAD LEARNED NEVER TO RELY ON THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS.


A CHILD WHO KNEW ONLY THE REMOTE, STONY FACE OF HIS FATHER, AND THOUGHT THAT SO HE, TOO, SHOULD LIVE.

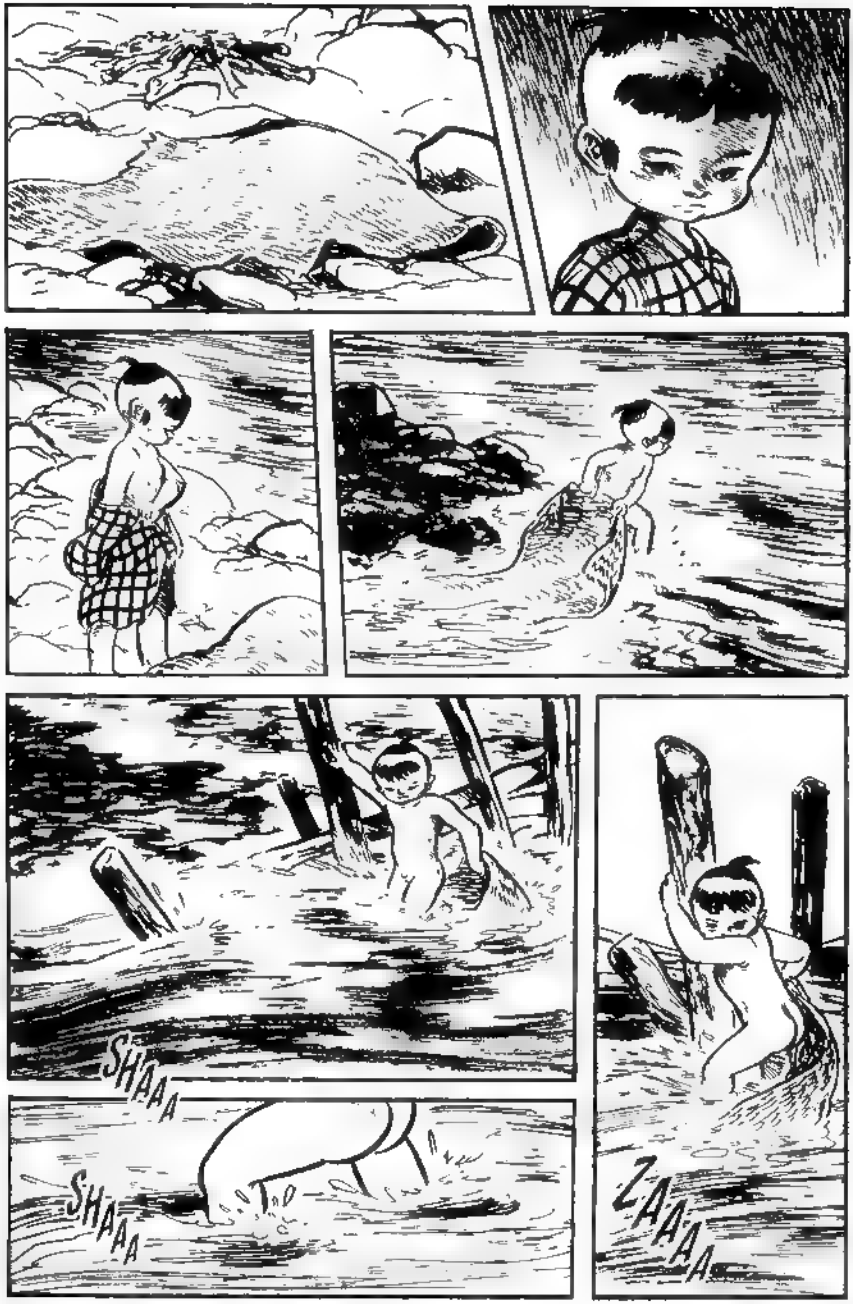
TO THE BOY, THE DANCING SILVER SCALES ON THE WEIR SEEMED INFINITELY PRECIOUS.

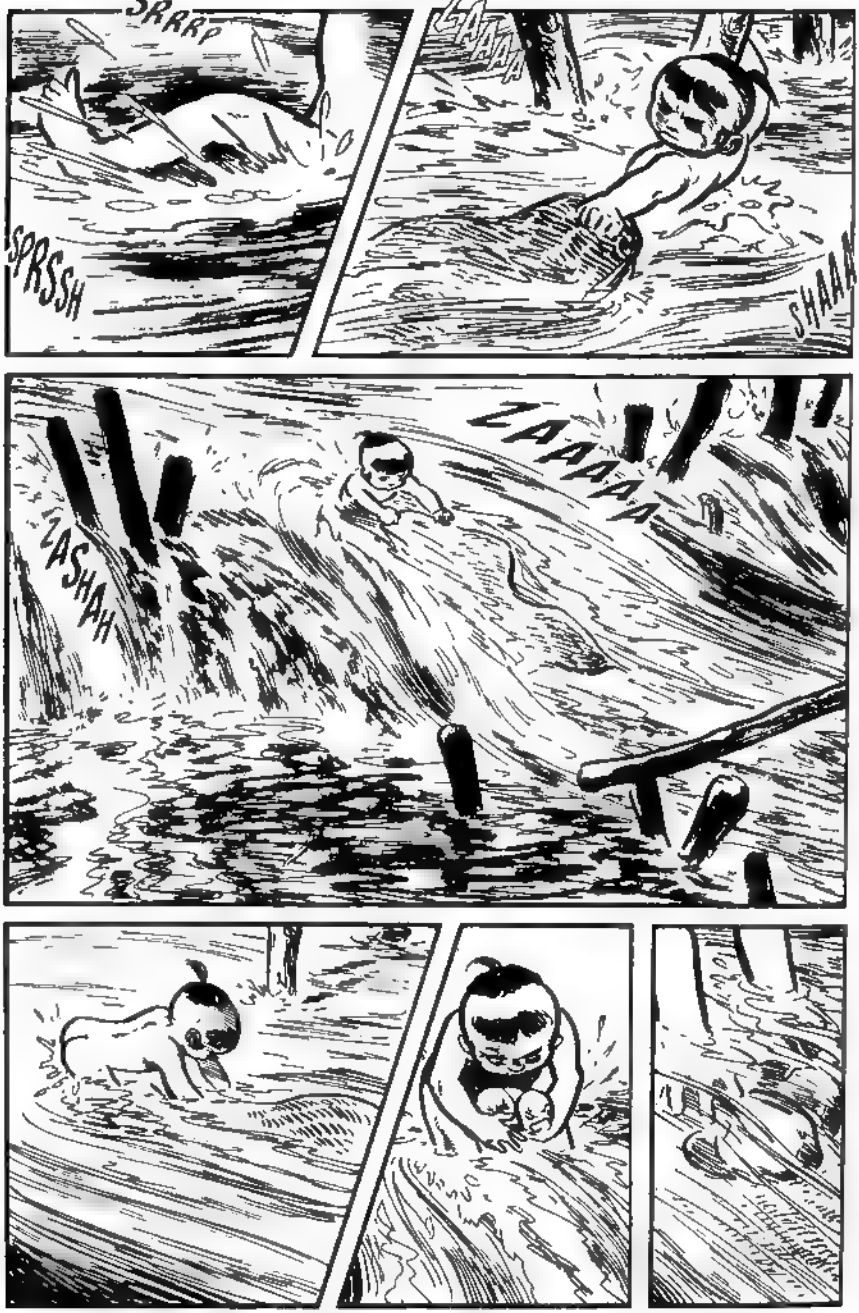

SO MANY PEOPLE HAD SWEATED SO LONG AND HARD TO CATCH THEM HE COULD NOT CONCEIVE OF TAKING WITHOUT GIVING IN RETURN.

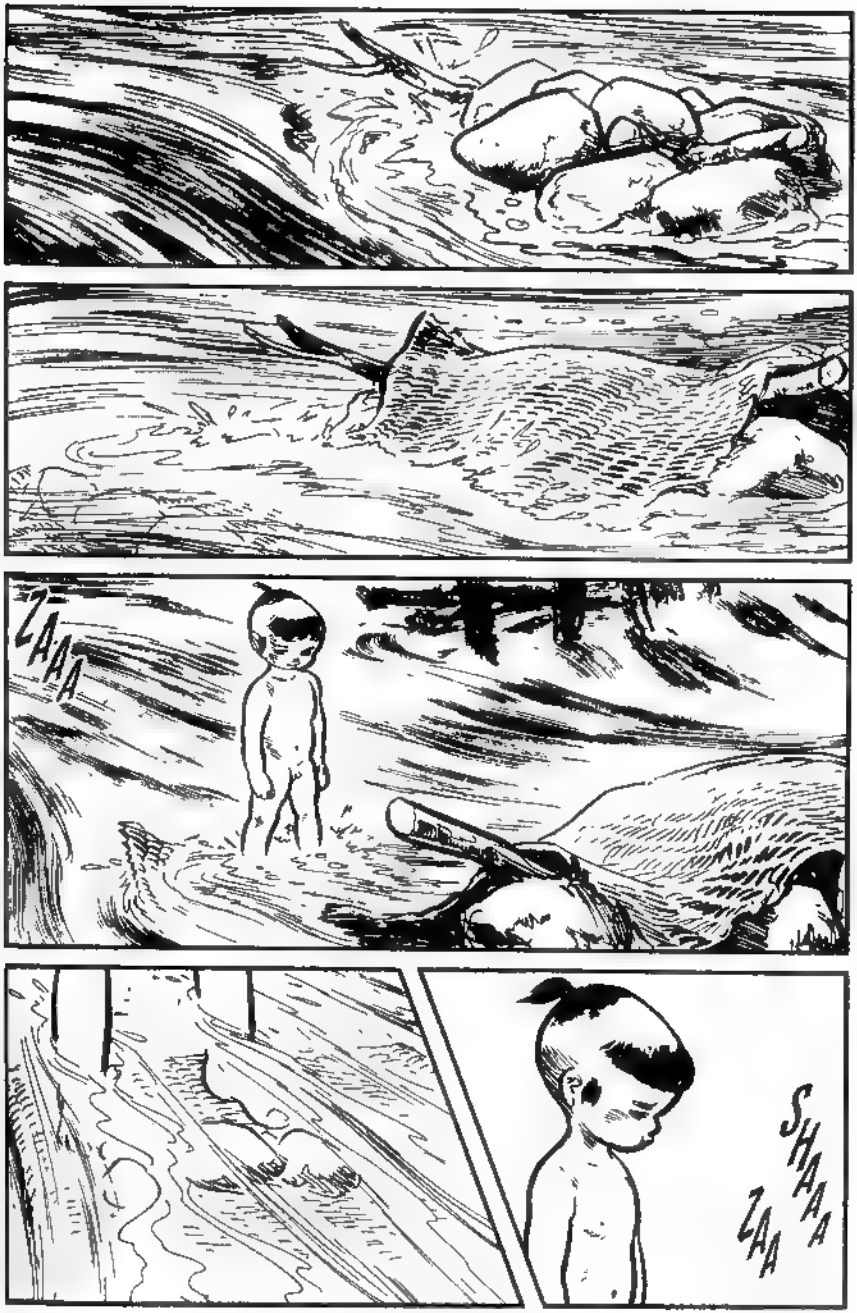

AND TO THE BOY, THERE WAS ONLY ONE WAY TO GIVE. LIKE HIS FATHER, HE MUST PUT HIS LIFE ON THE LINE.
HE WAS THE SON OF AN ASSASSIN. GOLD RECEIVED . FOR HUMAN LIVES.

WELL, LET'S CALL IT A DAY
HOW LONG'S THAT LITTLE ONE GONNA STAY HERE?
MAYBE HE BE WAITING ON HIS FOLKS. ?
MEBBE. BUT S IT OKAY JUST TO LEAVE HIM?
YOU WANT T' TAKE HIM?

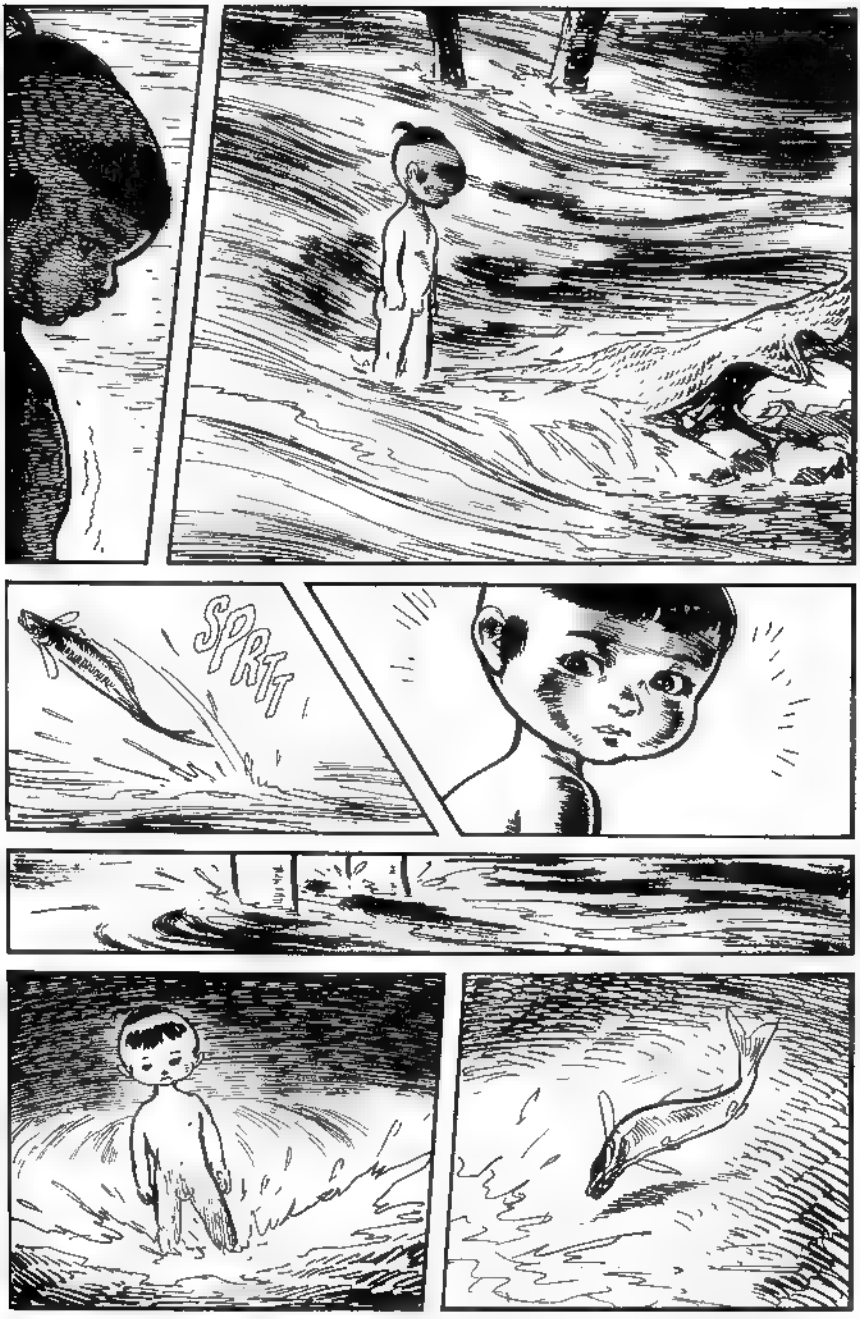
. . . .
. . . .
MIND YER, DON'T NONE OF US GOT TIME TO FEED ANOTHER MOUTH FROM WE DON'T KNOW WHERE.
RIGHT, Y'ALL?
AIN'T IT THE TRUTH..!

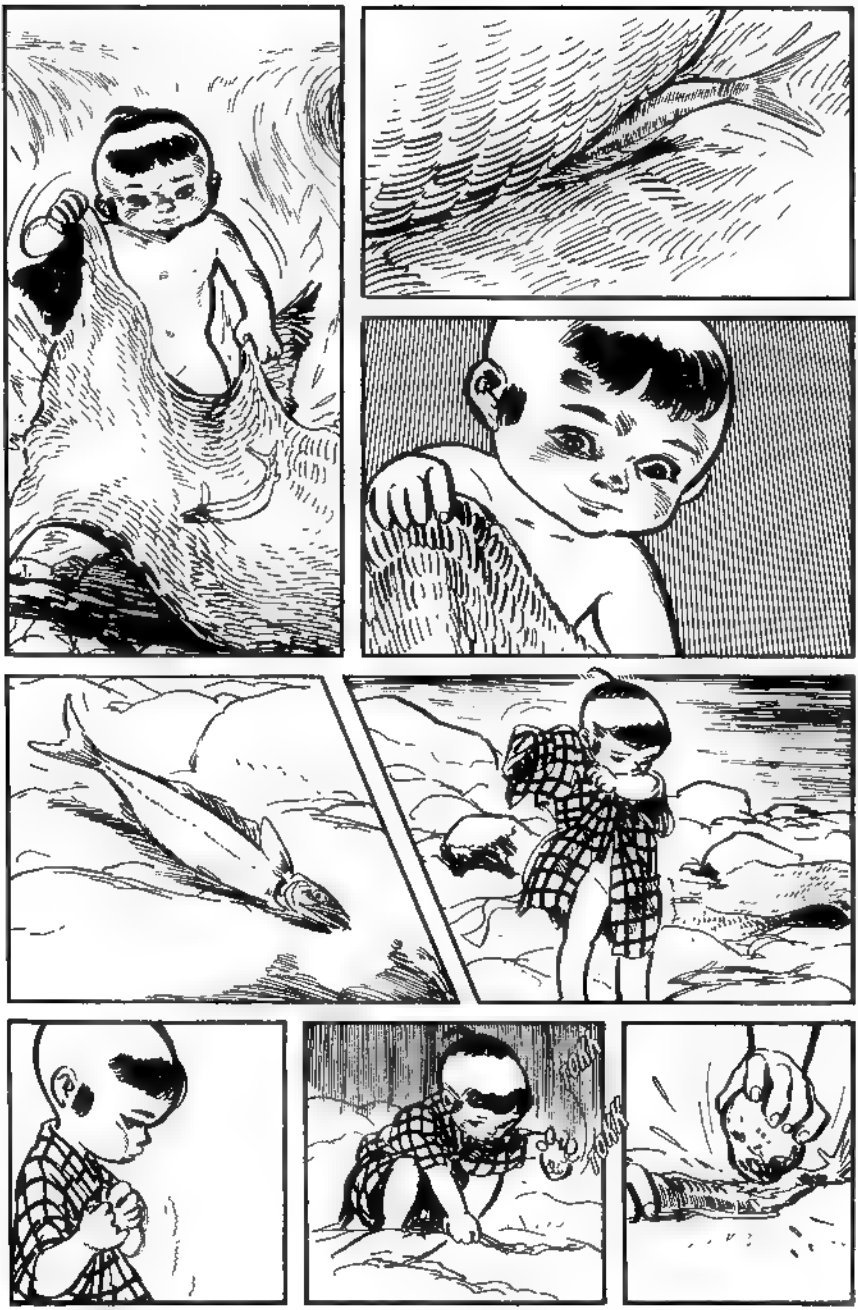

SHAAA
SHAAA
ZAAAA


SRRR
SPRSSH
ZAAAA
SHAAA
ZAAAAA
ZASHAH


ZAAA
SHAAA
ZAA

ZAAH
ZAAAA


SPRT



TOKK
TOKK
LORDY! YER STILL HERE?!
I BEEN SO WORRIED ABOUT YE, I JUST HAD TO SEE WHAT
OH.. YOU POOR CHILD...!

AUNTIE!
OH, YE MUST BE LONELY! YE MUST BE HUNGRY!
THANK HEAVENS I CAME, THANK HEAVENS!
THERE, THERE. COME HOME WITH AUNTIE.

"MOTHER AND CHILD" SHRINE
子持神社

EVENIN', YOUR HOLINESS ..

HAH?!
. . . .
. . . . !
SHI, SHISHŌGAN! IN A CHILD?!
THE. THE HORROR! THIS BOY'S EYES...

H-HOW CAN THIS BE?
YABUME-SAMA? WHAT WHAT'S WRONG?

HIS EYES!
SHISHŌGAN! BEYOND MISTAKE!
TERRIFYING EYES! THE EYES OF ONE WHO HAS GAZED UPON HELL SINCE BIRTH!

THOSE PUPILS, SO LARGE AND STILL. THE WHITE SPREADING OUT AND DOWN.
LIKE THE EYES OF AN ASSASSIN, DEALING AND ESCAPING DEATH TOO MANY TIMES!
TO SEE SUCH EYES IN A CHILD! MY BLOOD RUNS COLD!
BORN UNDER STRANGE STARS. A TERRIBLE CHILD! TWISTING HEAVEN AND EARTH TOWARD DESTRUCTION!
OKAN-DONO! I DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU FOUND HIM, BUT LET HIM GO RIGHT NOW!
WH- WHAT DO YOU..

YABUME-SAMA WE DONE COME FOR YE, MA'AM, THE SERVICE
IT MAY SEEM CRUEL, BUT DRIVE HIM AWAY TRUST THE WORDS OF YABUME
UNDERSTAND OHAN DONO? YOU MUSTN'T SHELTER HIM!
BUT BUT
YABUME-SAMA ?

THIS BOY ISN'T—
AH! WAIT! DON'T GO!
WHERE YE BE GOING?!

NOW SEE WHAT YE'VE DONE?
LOOK AT THAT GREAT BIG OUCHIE.
YE HEARD WHAT YABUME-SAMA SAID? WAS THAT IT? IS THAT WHY YE RAN?
YE DIDN'T WANT TO CAUSE US NO TROUBLE.
IS THAT WHY? POOR, POOR CHILD.
YOU JUST COME ON HOME WITH AUNTIE. I WON'T GIVE HER NO NEVER MIND.

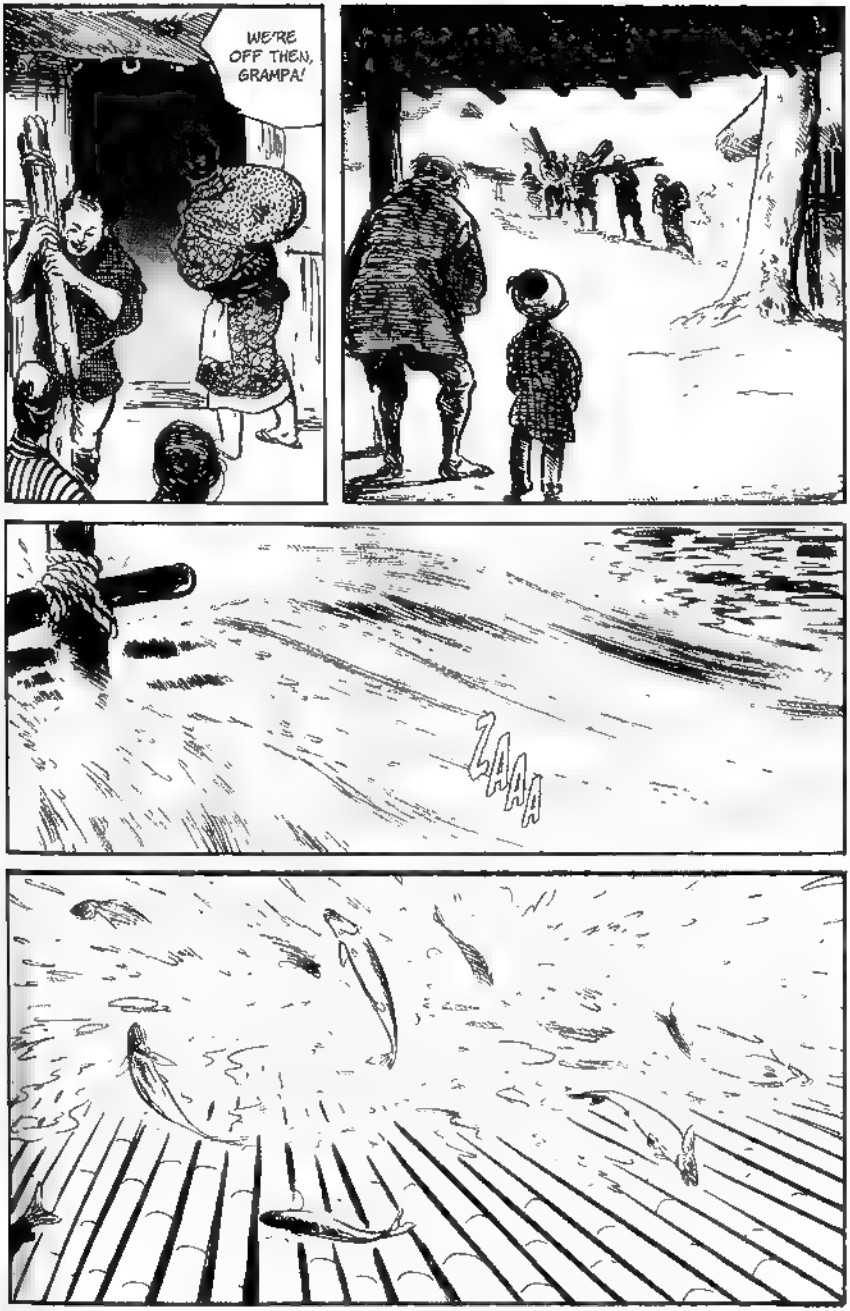
FEELS GOOD ?

NOW YOU FILL YOUR TUMMY AND DON'T BE SHY!
OH, WHAT A SWEET LI'L SMILE!
SO WHERE IS HE FROM? THEM'S LOW PARENTS, FOR SURE.
BUT WHAT'S DONE IS DONE. WE'LL HOLD ON TO 'IM.

AYE, THAT BE GOOD!
CUTE L'L TYKE.
GOOD MANNERS, TOO!
HIT
AHH! NOT AG'IN! THAT'S DANGEROUS, GRANPAPPY!

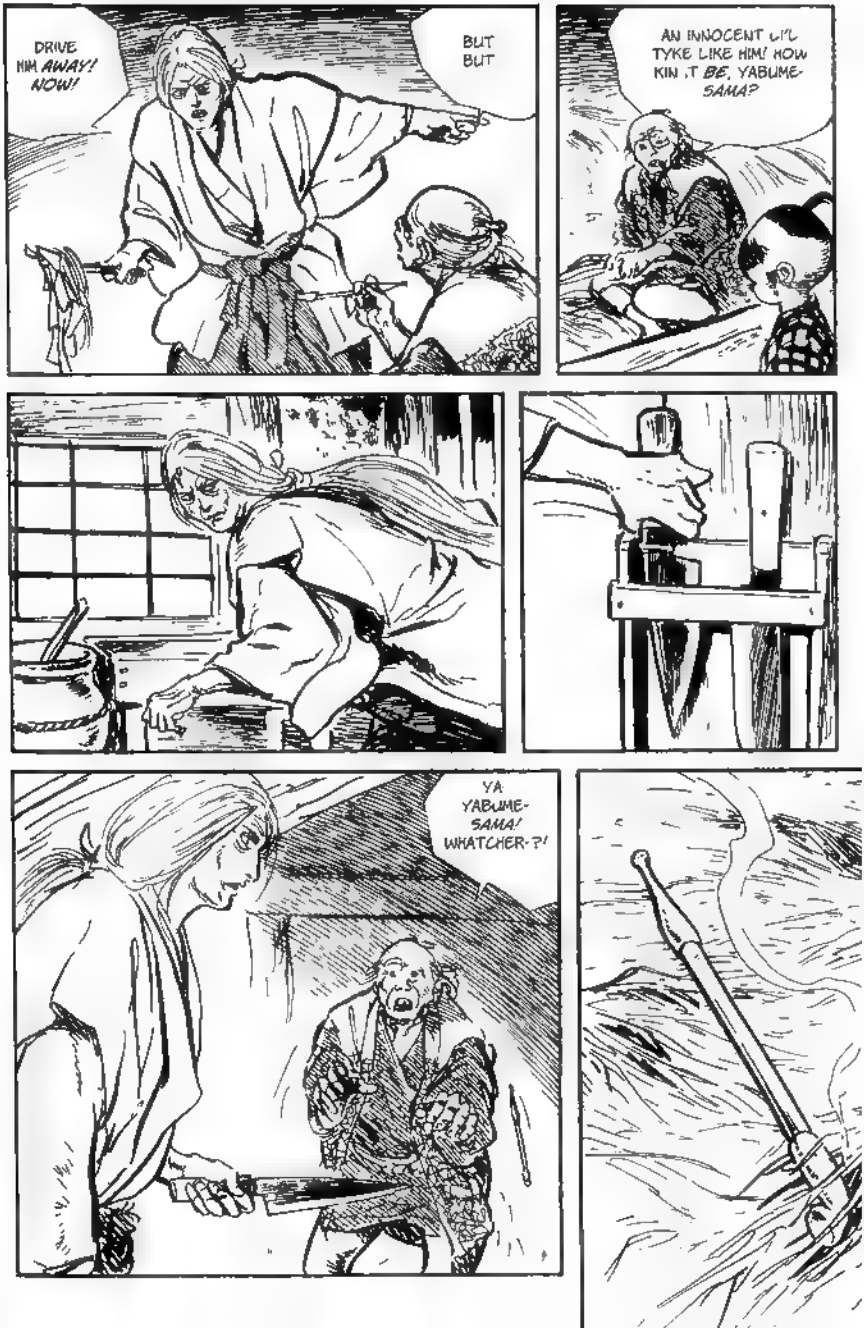
YER GETTIN' SENILE, DANG IT!
I'M TELLIN' YA! BE CAREFUL WHEN YE SMOKE!
WHAT-'CHER SAY?
WHEN SMOKE! BE! CAREFUL! DANGEROUS!
EH? HAPY
DAGNABBIT! YOU KIN HEAR WELL ENOUGH WHEN IT SUITS YE! YE SHOULD QUIT THAT DURN T'BACCY, ANY-HOW
IT'S TOO DURN EXPENSIVE!
NOW, NOW' IT'S GRAMPA'S ONLY PLEASURE, HM?
WELL.. LET'S HIT THE SACK

ANOTHER FINE DAY!
MORNIN', SLEEPY-HEADS!
HAIN'T WE LUCKY. YEP


WE'RE OFF THEN, GRAMPA!
ZAAA

ehnn!
eh!
unng!

WHY, YABUME-SAMA!
GRANDPA GEN! DRIVE THAT BOY OUT!
EH? HE DONE SOMETHIN' WRONG?
I WARNED OKAN LAST NIGHT!
THAT BOY IS EVIL! BORN UNDER A BAD STAR! HE'LL BRING DOWN DOOM UPON YOU!


DRIVE HIM AWAY! NOW!
BUT BUT
AN INNOCENT LI'L TYKE LIKE HIM! HOW KIN IT BE, YABUME-SAMA?
YA YABUME-SAMA! WHATCHER-?!

SEE FOR YOUR-SELF!
BEHOLD! HE DOESN'T FEAR THE BLADE! OR EVEN
CHUNK

MY BLOOD!
HIEE!
EYES THAT GAZE ON CORPSES AND SLAUGHTER! HE KNOWS THE STINK OF BLOOD!
IF HE WAS GROWN, A YAKUZA, A KEIKYAKU! BUT IN SUCH A CHILD
IN SUCH A TINY CHILD SUCH HORROR!
THAT'S YOUR SHISHŌGAN!
OUT! GET OUT!
NOW!

OUT, EVIL SPIRIT!
HAH! HAHH!
OUT, EVIL SPIRIT!
BEGONE! SHISHŌGAN SPAWN!
BEGONE!

FWOOOSH
AHH?!
AHHH!
OH! OH! T'S TRUE!

AHHH!!
UHFF!
HAG!
KHHF!
HAHFF!
KWHOOSH!

AHH-HH!
TAICHI!
TAICHI!
STOP! IT'S TOO LATE!
YOU MUSTN'T!
LEMME GO! MY GRANDBABY! MY TAICHI...!

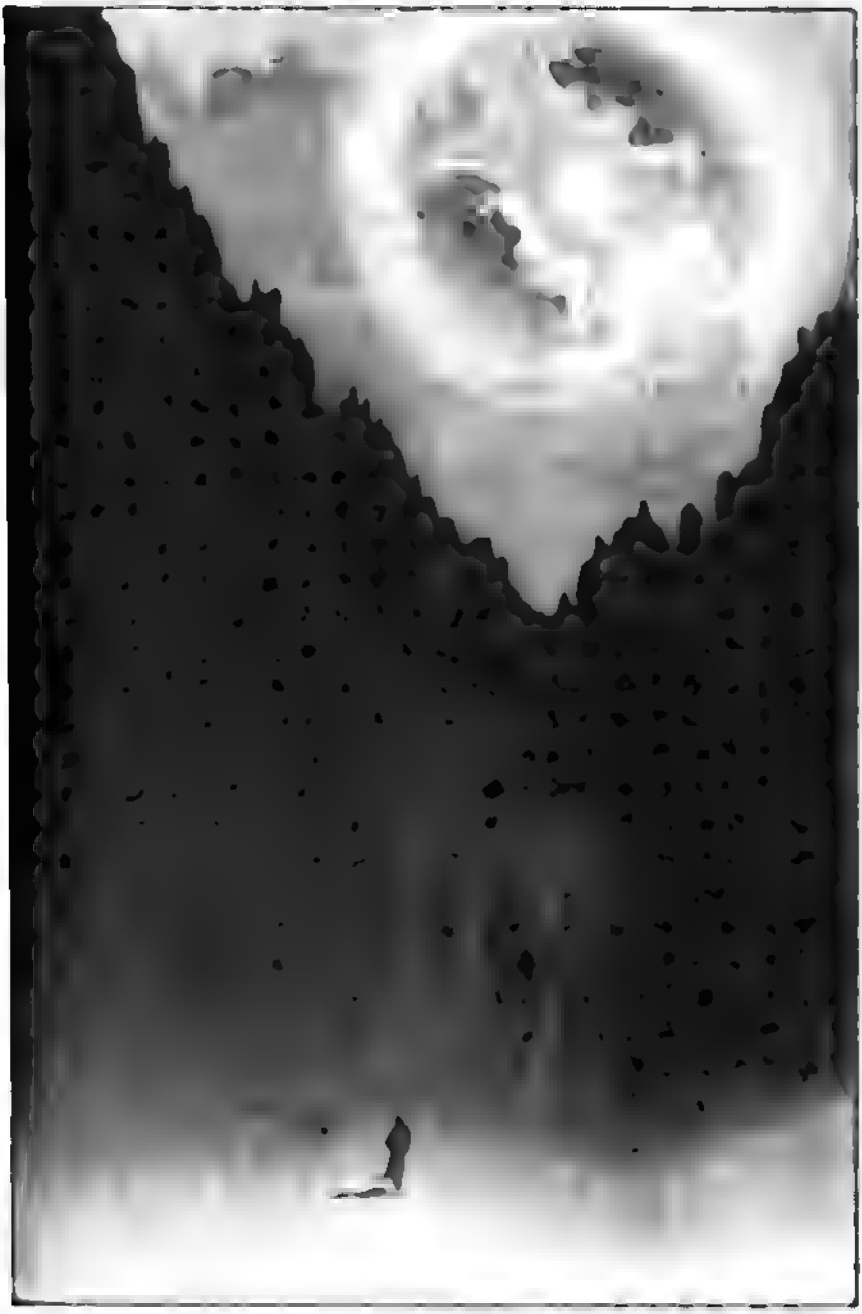
AHP!
WHAT'S THAT?!
P-FIRB!!

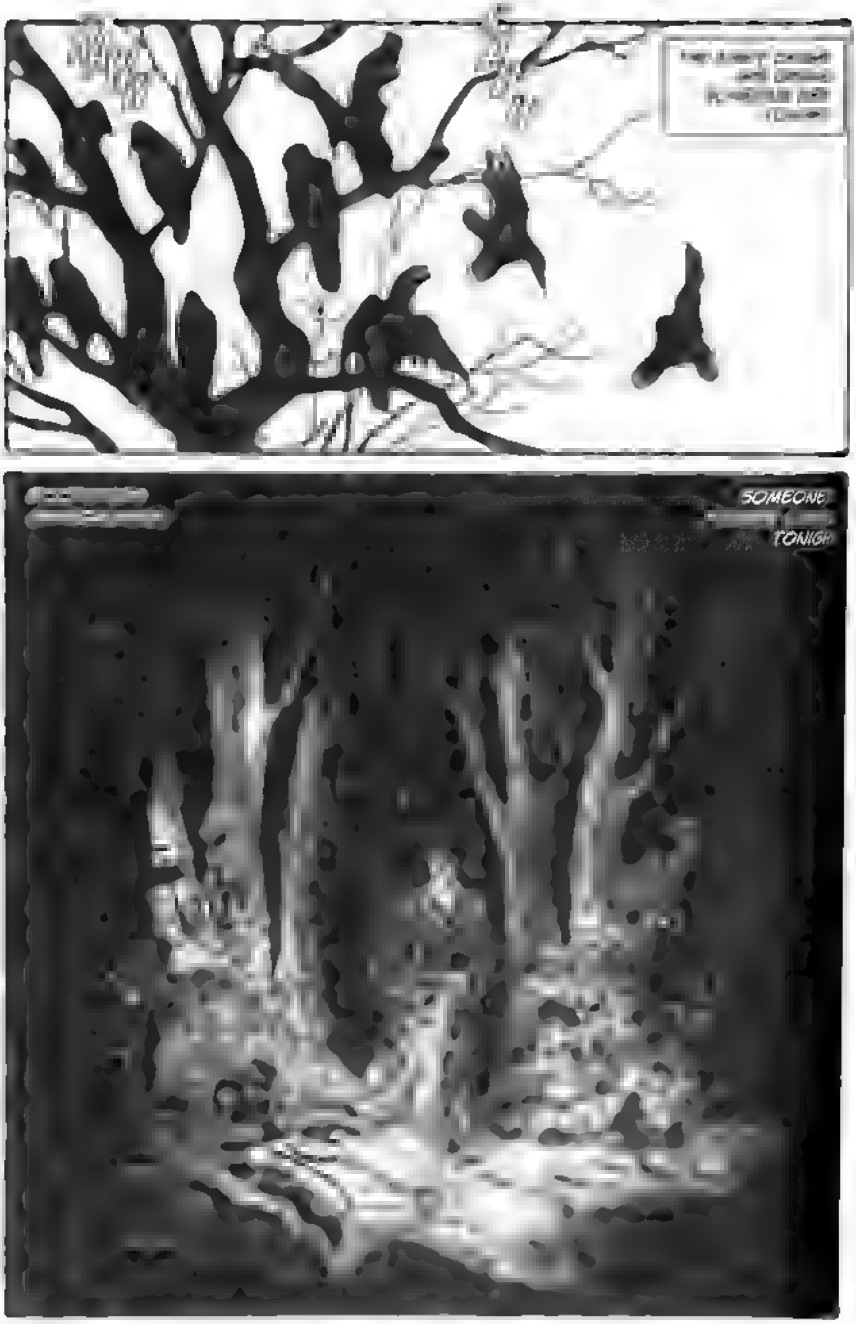
GRAMPA! TAICHI—WHERE'S BABY TAICHI?!
GRAN-PAPPY!
TAICHI! TAICHI!
AHHH! AHHH!
TAICHI ...!
THE HORROR HAS COME!
IT'S THE CURSE OF THAT CHILD THE CURSE OF SHISHŌGAN
AH! THAT BOY?! WHERE-?!
HAH?! STILL HERE?!

DRIVE HIM AWAY!!
waah!
ngyaa!
OHH!
TAICHI!
MY POOR TAICHI!

the fifty-third

Drifting Shadows

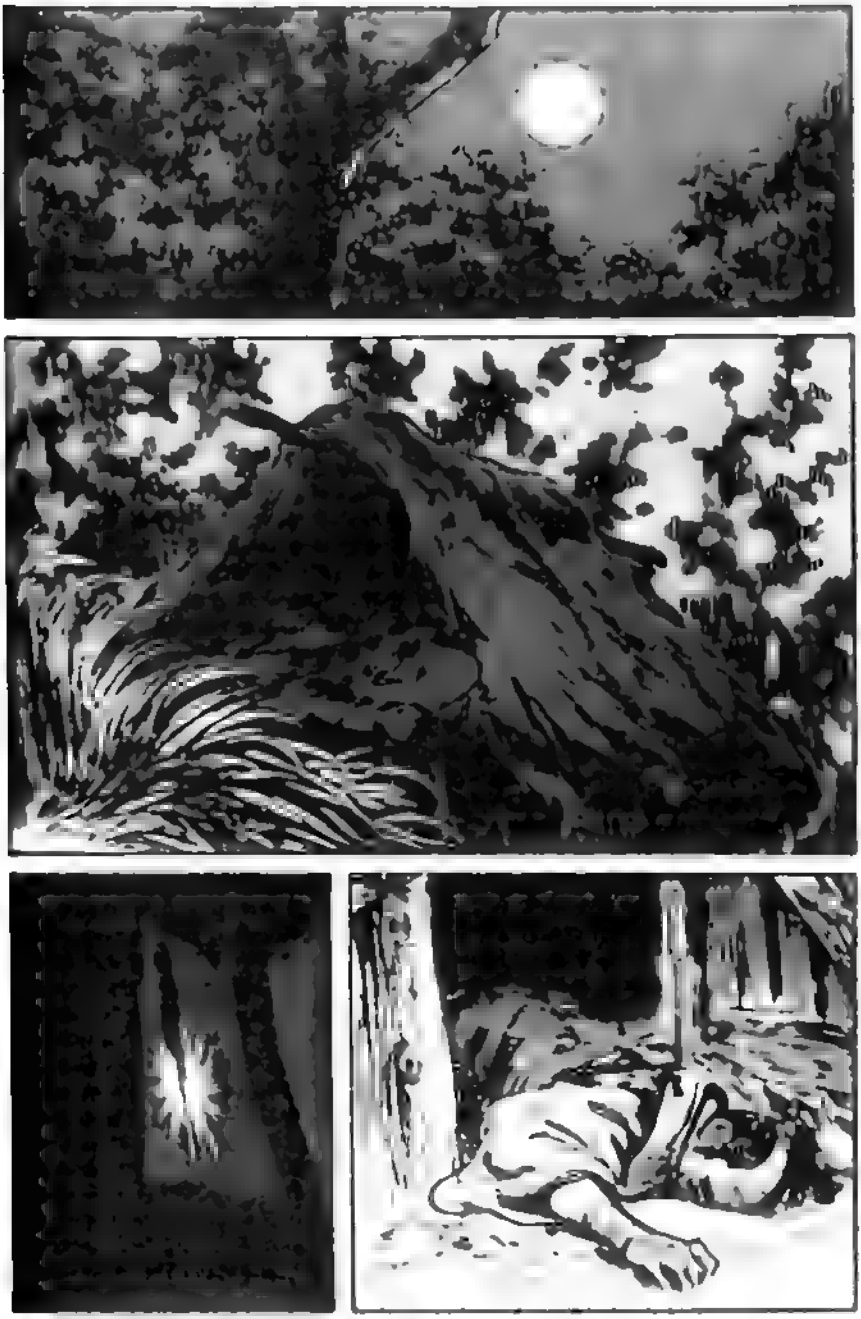



SOMEONE
TONIGH

MEONE'S FATHER COMES TONIGHT
INSECTS SILENCED· SOMEONE'S FATE TO DIE THIS NIGHT.

A BABY CARRIAGE BY THE RIVER STYX..
THE WOLVES ARE COMING..
LONE WOLF AND CUB.

FOOTSTEPS APPROACHING...



YAGYŪ...?

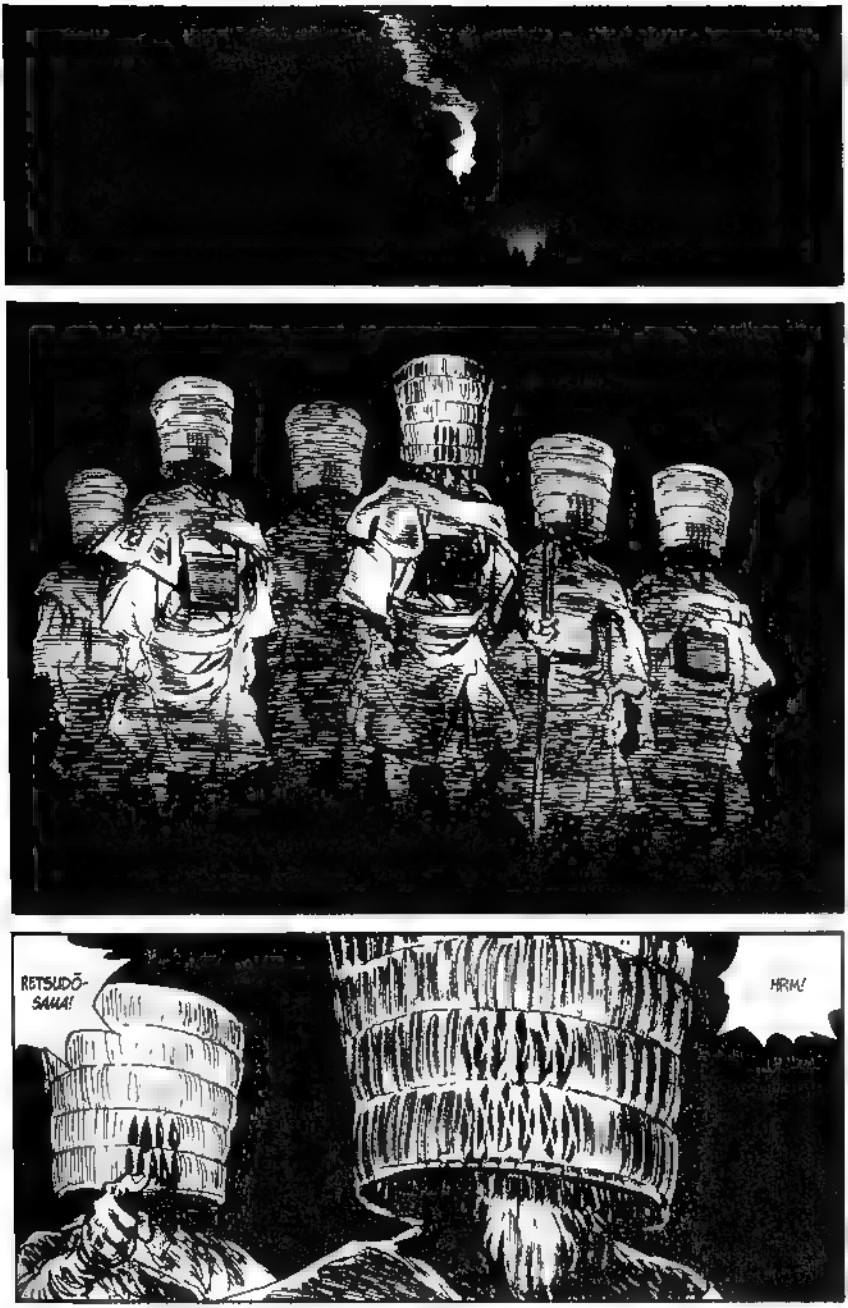
YES
NO
DOUBT
THIS MAN
KILLED ONE,
AND THOUGH
CUT DOWN
HIMSELF
HE THREW
HIS SWORD
AT ANOTHER
RUNNING FOR
THE DOOR.
THE
YAGYŪ NEVER
FLEE THEIR
ENEMIES.

SO THE SECOND MAN WAS IN PURSUIT
WHO WOULD THE YAGYU PURSUE EXCEPT DAIGORO?
THIS GOOD MAN PROTECTED DAIGORO...
HOW MANY WERE THERE?
IF THERE WERE MORE THAN TWO THEN DAIGORO'S LIFE

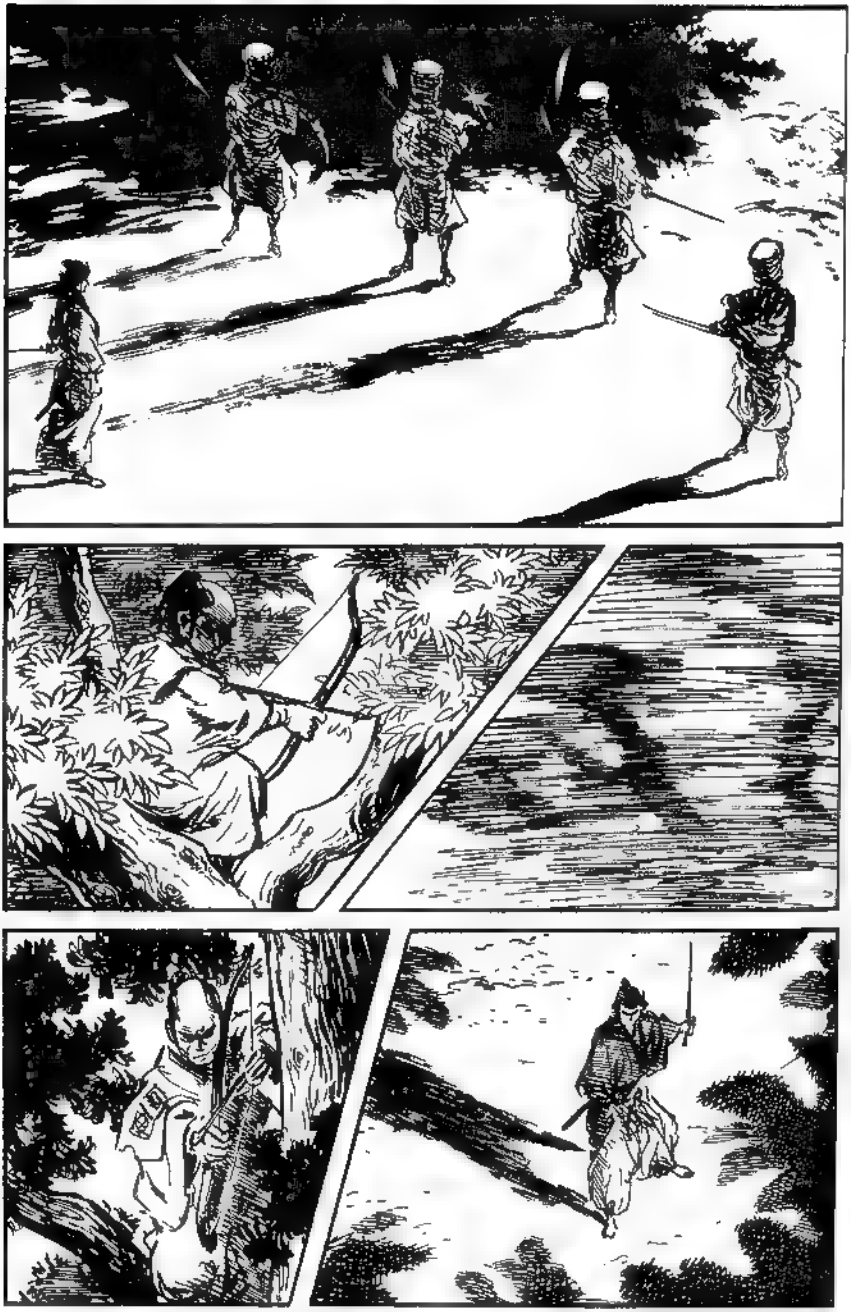
THE FATHER COULD READ WHAT HAD HAPPENED HERE THIS NIGHT
ALMOST CERTAINLY THIS NOBLE MAN HAD PERISHED PROTECTING HIS CHILD
AS A SAMURAI, IT WAS ONLY FITTING THAT HE RETURN HIM TO ASH.

A NIGHT FIRE WAS DANGEROUS. IT WAS THE SAME AS ANNOUNCING HIS LOCATION TO THE YAGYŪ.
YET HE WAS A FATHER WHO FOUND *PURPOSE* IN *DEATH*.

EVEN THOUGH HE WAS A FATHER FOR WHOM EVERY SECOND COUNTED AS HE SEARCHED FOR HIS SON.


RETSUDŌ-
SAWA!
HRM!

*YAGYŪ CLANSMAN
*MASTER OF THE HOUSE
*YAGYŪ CLANSMAN
HE HAD ALSO CREMATED THE BODIES OF THE YAGYŪ ASSASSINS. THOUGH MORTAL ENEMIES, THEY WERE NONETHELESS SAMURAI
HE WAS A FATHER WHO LIVED BY THE SIX PATHS AND THE FOUR LIVES A FATHER WHO BELIEVED THAT THE WARRIOR SEEKS LIFE IN DEATH



HRN!
FWSHH

SKUSSH

I SEE YOU'VE CREMATED TWO OF MY MEN. SUCH A COURTESY DEMANDS A COURTESY IN RETURN.
. . . .
. . . .
AND SO, ITTŌ!
ARE YOU READY TO RETURN THE YAGYŪ LETTER?

DO THAT, AND I GIVE YOU AND YOUR SON YOUR LIVES
LIVE WHEREVER AND HOWEVER YOU WISH, AS FIRST AGREED. WE YAGYŪ WILL NOT TOUCH YOU!
NEVER!!
VENGEANCE ONLY! I'LL EXPOSE YOUR LETTERS, AND CRUSH YOUR YAGYŪ UNTIL NO TRACE REMAINS!
WHERE IS YOUR ONLY SON, DAIGORO?!
. . . .
HOW PATHETIC I DUB THEE. LONE WOLF WITHOUT CUB!
. . . .
THREE DAYS TO CHANGE YOUR MIND! SHARPEN YOUR SWORD, OR HUNT FOR DAIGORO. THAT IS OUR GRATITUDE.

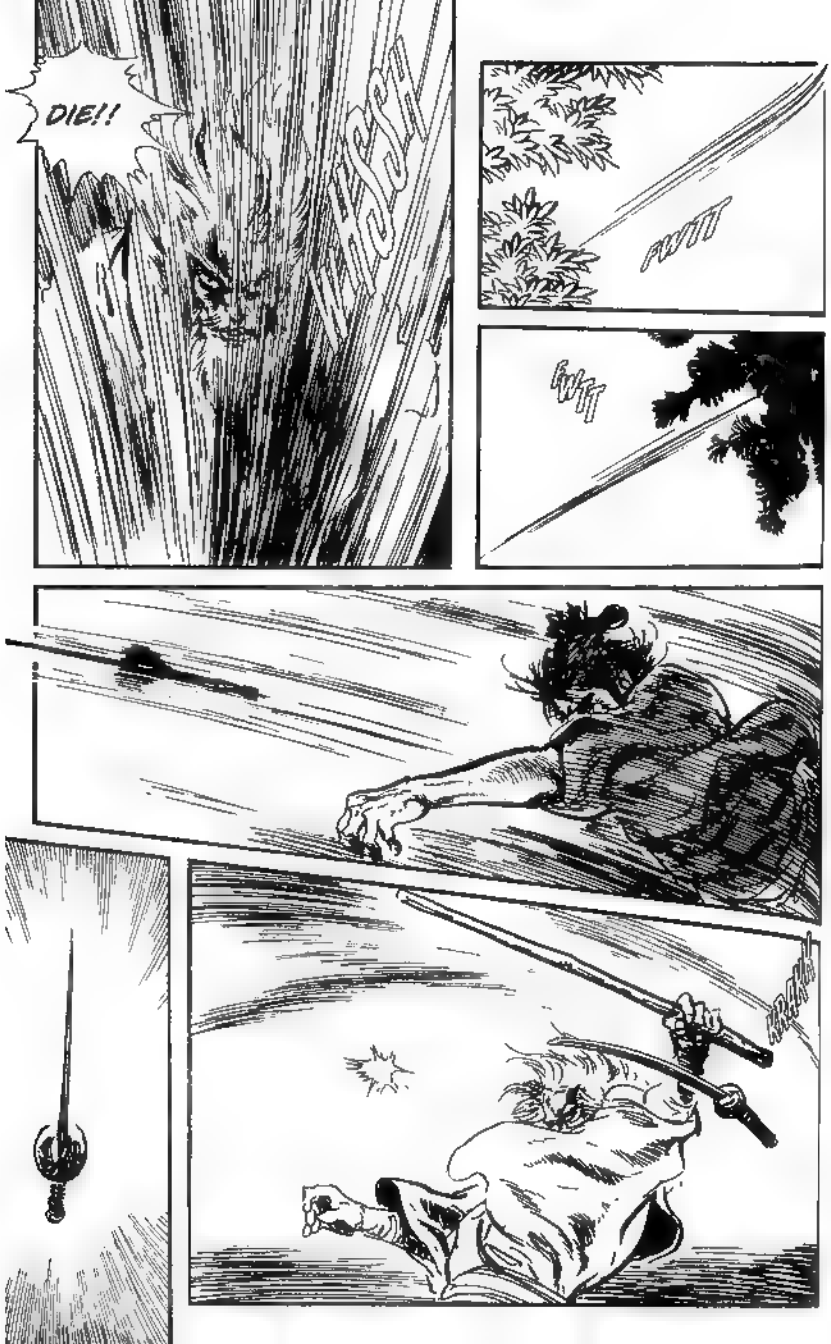
UNDERSTOOD?! WHEN THE FOURTH DAY DAWNS, THE YAGYŪ PURSUE YOU WITH ALL OUR MIGHT!
I WELCOME IT!
IT PLEASES ME TO SEE YOU SO PANICKED
THE LIKES OF YOU CAN NEVER BREAK OUR SECRET! KNOW YOUR LIMITATIONS!
NOW GO!
FWTT
FWTT

HRNG!
WHSSH
GHOK
GHOK
RIYAHHHH!
COWARDS!!

ERG!
THE SWORDS OF THE YAGYŪ HAVE NO PEER! THEY RULE THE SIXTY DOMAINS OF JAPAN THE ASSASSIN SWORDS OF THE SHŌGUN HIMSELF!

WE CRUSH ALL WHO DEFY US! NO MERCY, EVER!
TOO LATE NOW TO CRY COWARDICE!
ITTŌ.. YOU HAVE TRULY EXTRAORDI-NARY SKILL WITH YOUR SWORD—BUT YOU ARE STILL NO MATCH FOR ME.
COME!
FUTT

SST
FWK
NGN!


DIE!!
FWIT
FWIT

AHUSH!
HRRGH!

MMNG.
RNNG.
SKLCH

MY LORD!
RETSUDŌ-SAMA!
J-JUST KILL HIM! KILL ITTŌ!!

HYAA!
SHCCH

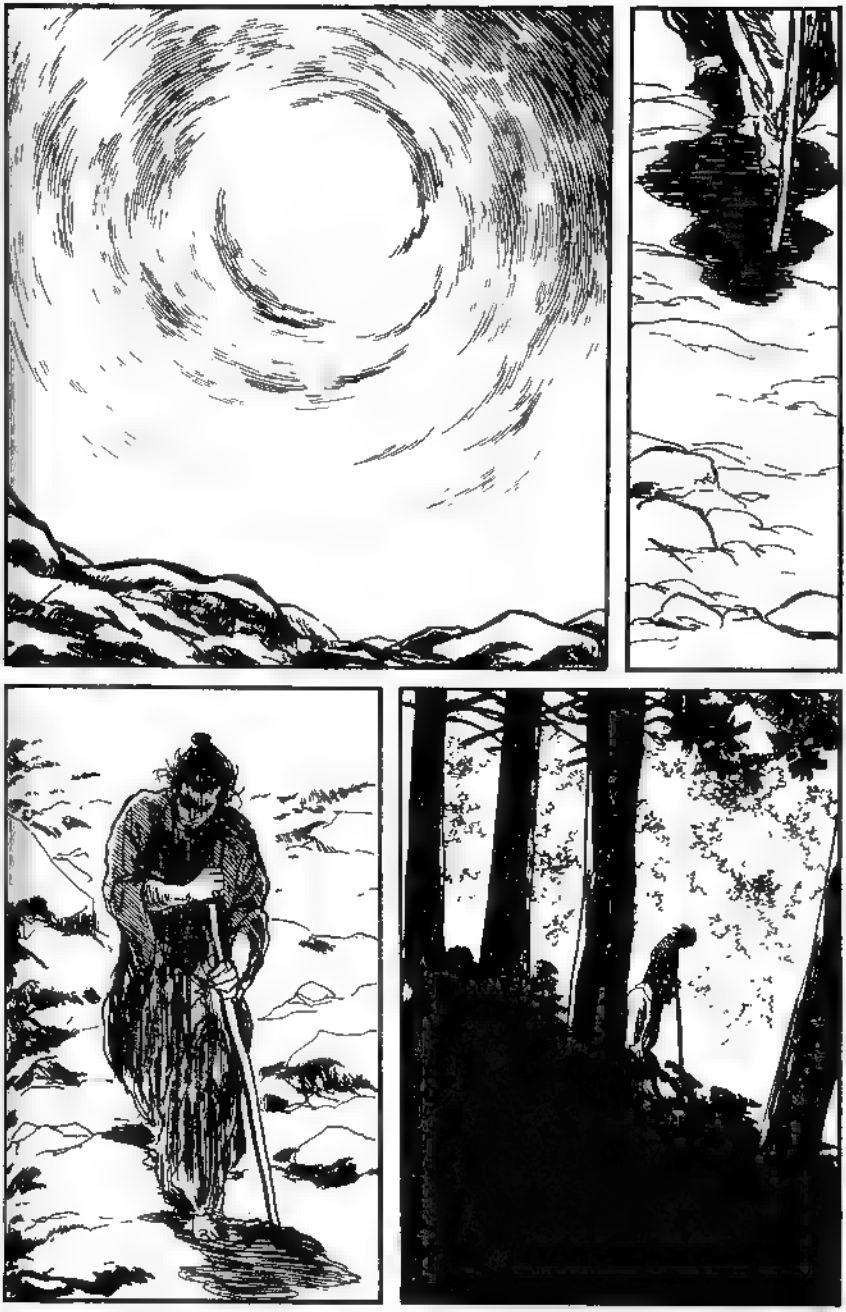
TAKK
WHSSSS
NGHK!
SKASSSH

HRRK!

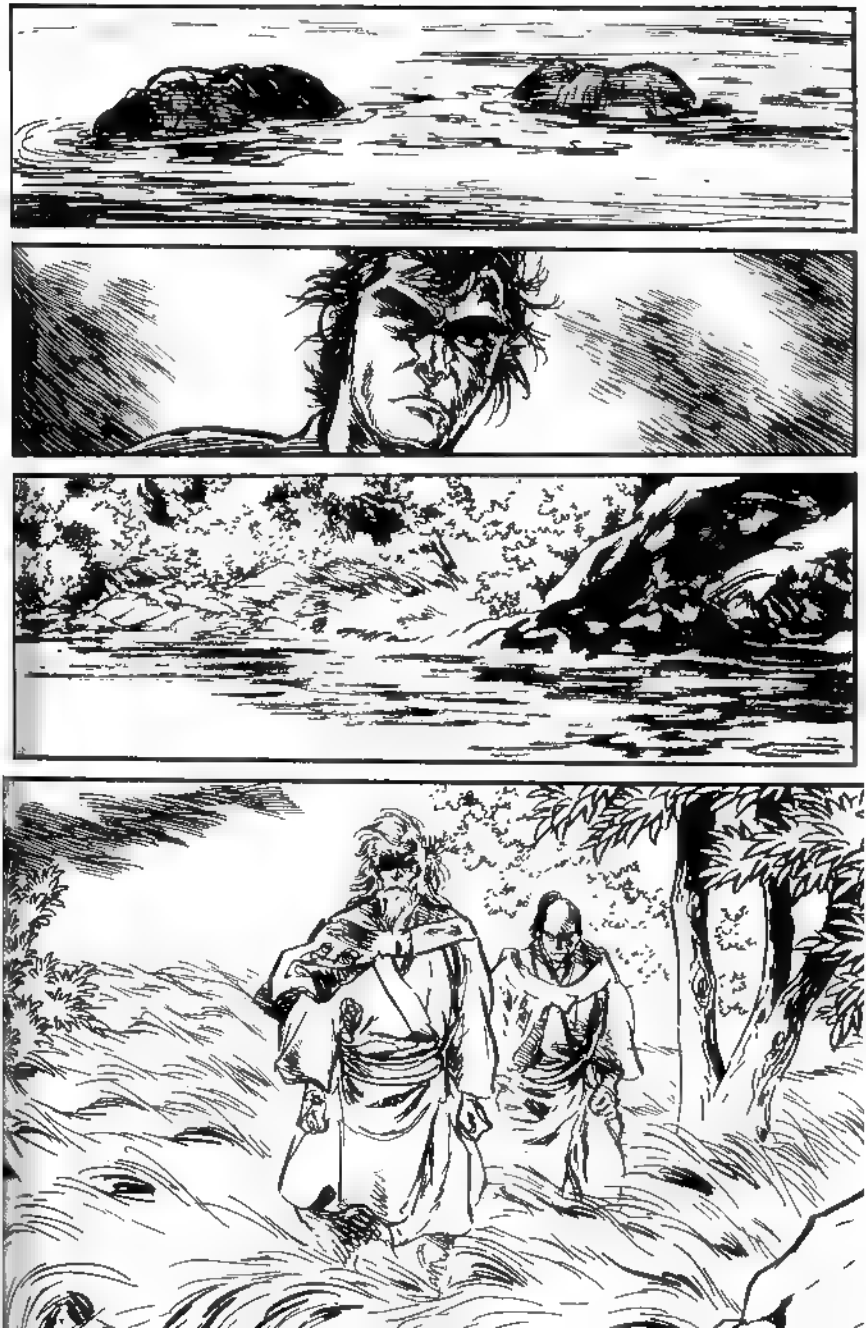
NNGG...!!

RETSUDŌ...?
RETSUDŌ!!

H-HE FLED ?
RETSUDŌ!!
RETSUDOOOOOOO



SLSH
BLRSSH
EEEEEEEEEK!!
AIIEE!



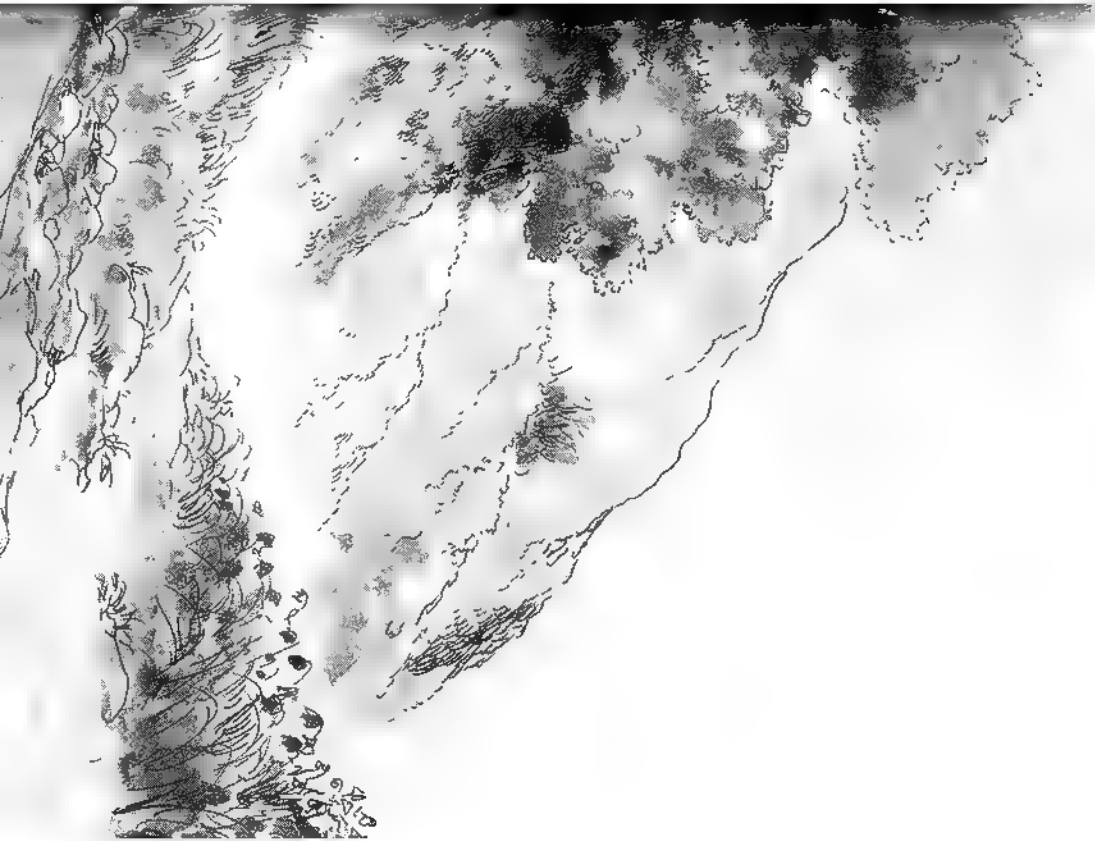
RAGH!
DAMN YOU, ITTŌ!
ENOUGH!
THE MOMENT HAS PASSED
MY MEN CUT DOWN LIKE *FLIES* EVEN MYSELF *WOUNDED!* WE MUST REGROUP BEFORE WE MOVE AGAINST HIM AGAIN.

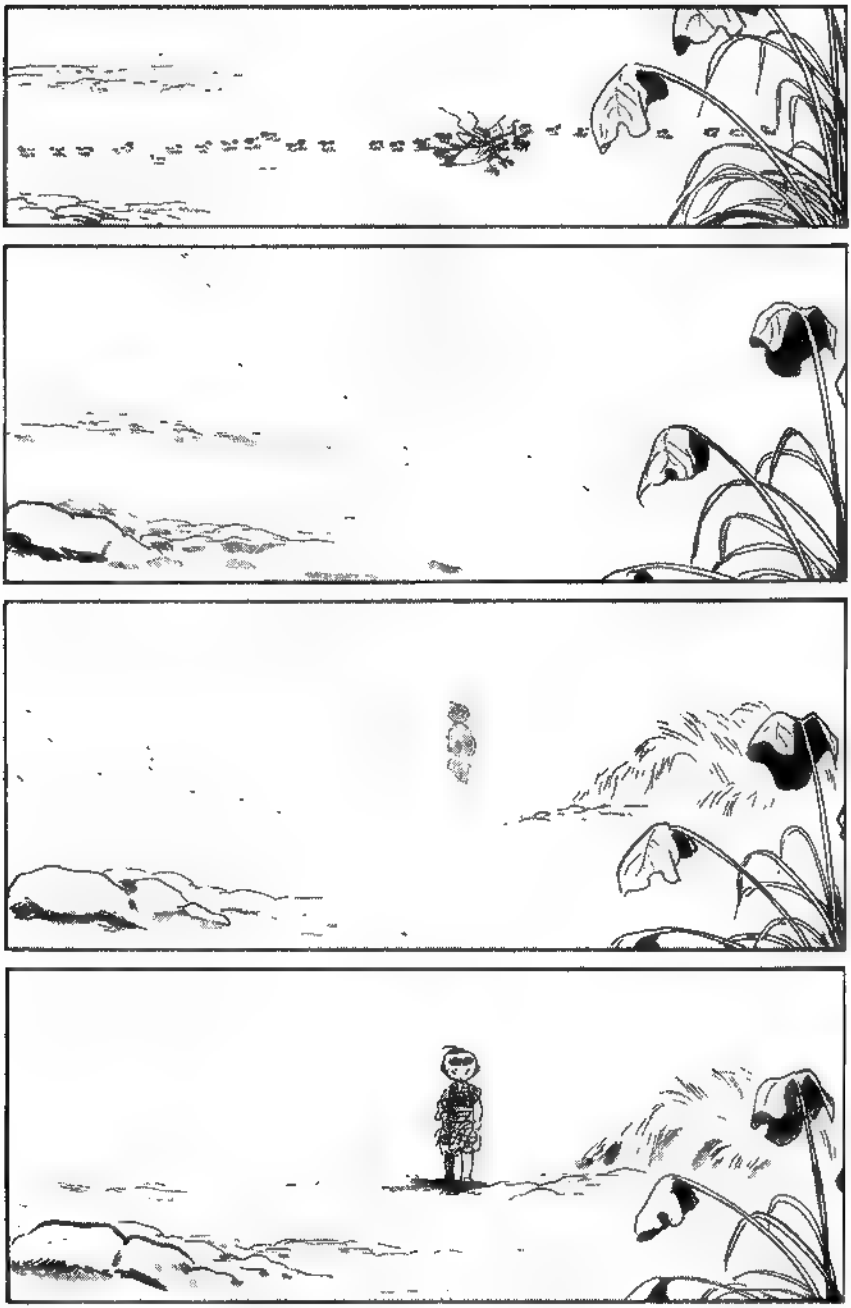
YET, ENEMY THOUGH HE BE. MAGNIFICENT! A MASTER OF SUIŌ ZANBATŌ
NO ONE, PAST NOR PRESENT, HAS GIVEN US SUCH A CHALLENGE.
KWIT
CHIRP

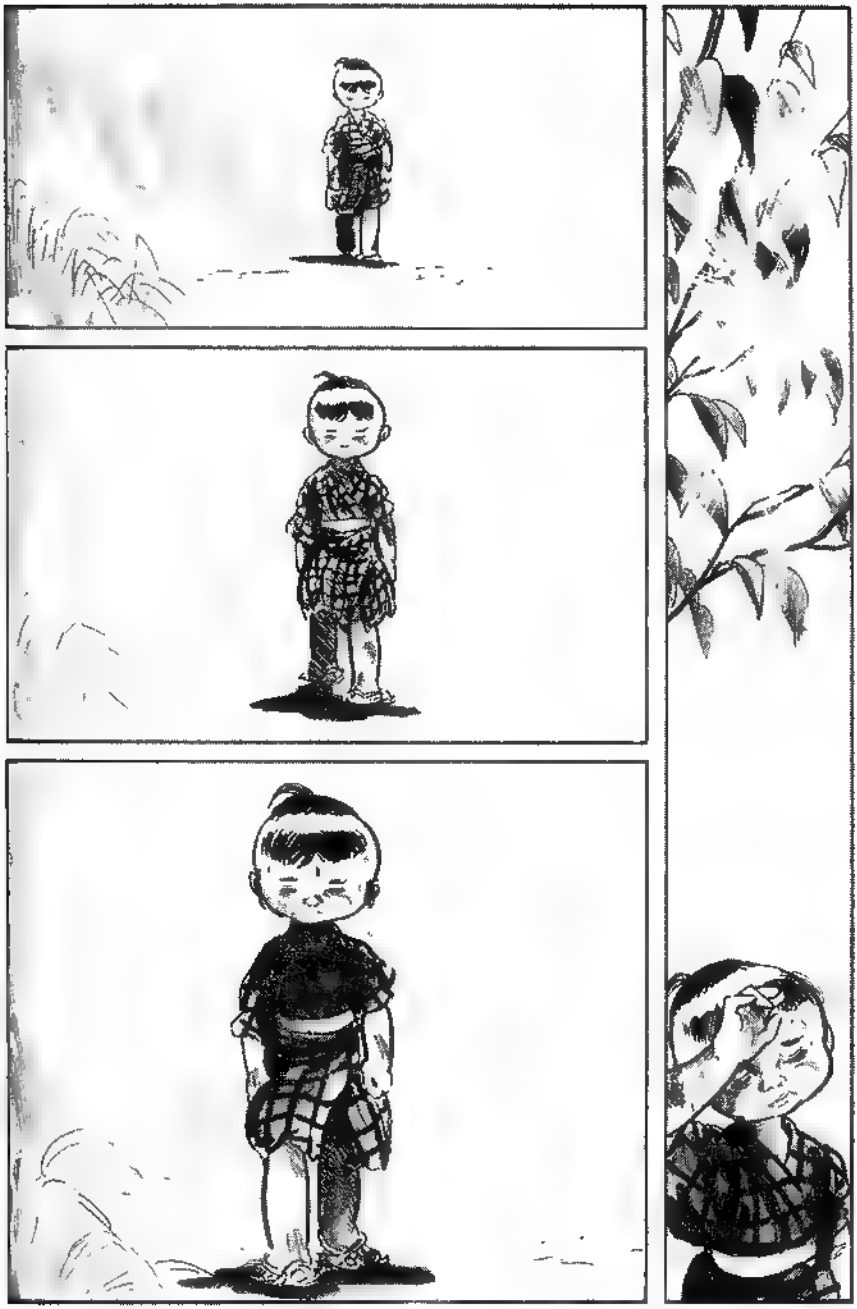
YOU ARE TRULY A DEMON OF MEIFUMADŌ, ŌGAMI ITTŌ
AND YET..

the fifty-fourth

Straw Boy



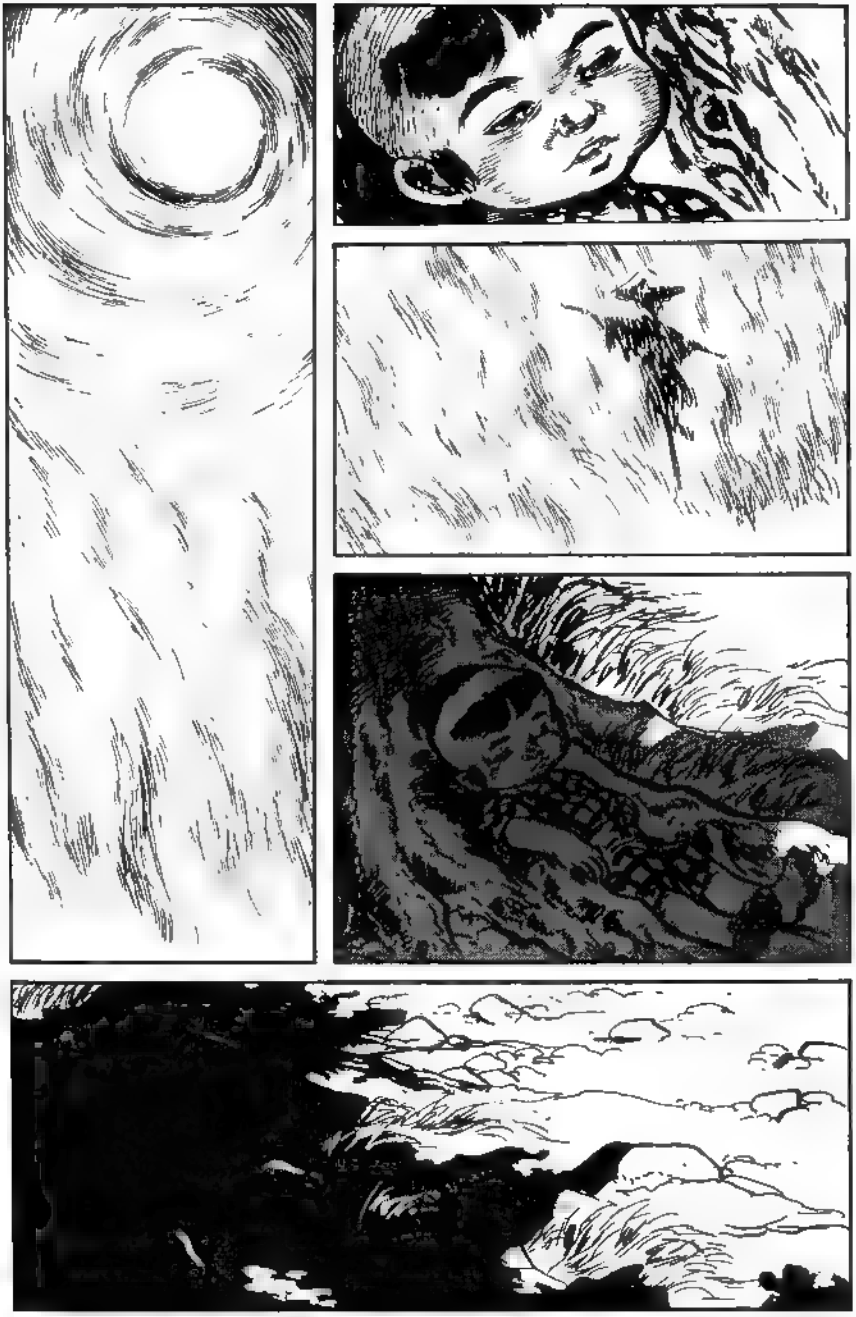


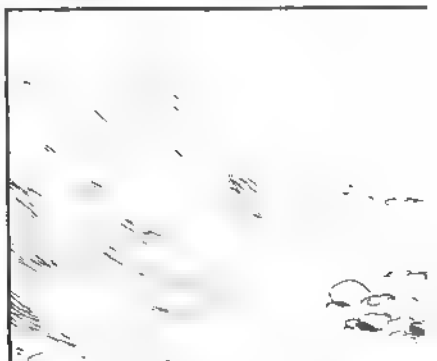


HE WAS STARVING. HE WAS BOILING. HIS STOMACH SLOSHED FULL OF WATER.

ANOTHER CHILD WOULD HAVE STOLEN VEGETABLES FROM THE FIELDS, EATEN THE OFFERINGS TO THE STONE JIZŌ ALONG THE ROAD
ANOTHER CHILD WOULD HAVE RELIED ON THE PITY AND COMPASSION OF OTHERS TO FILL HIS STOMACH
BUT THIS WAS A BOY WHO SCORNED SUCH WEAKNESS, THE CHILD OF A BITTER DESTINY

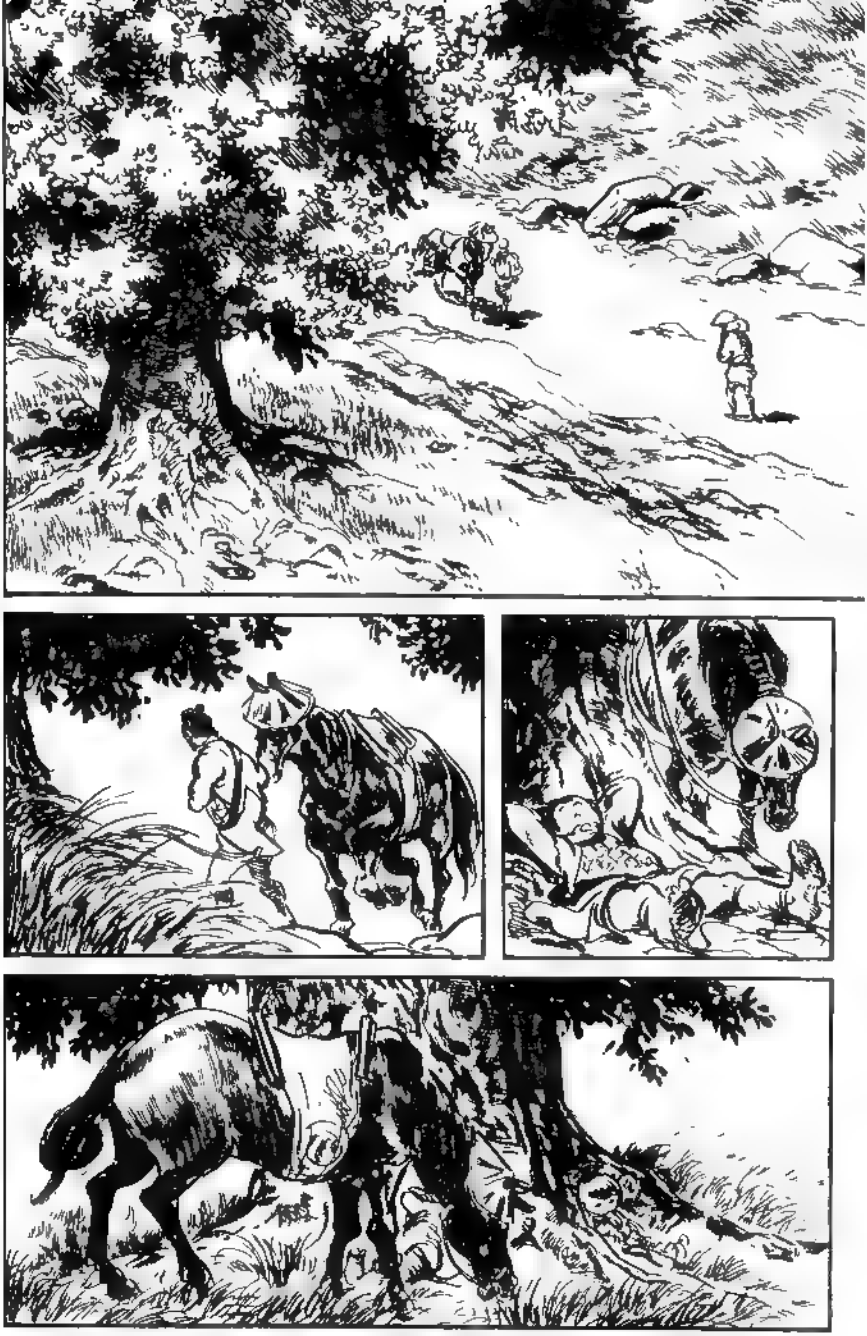
EVEN THIS GOLDEN SUMMER SUNLIGHT, THE SUN OF RIPENING RICE, OF LUSH SUMMER FIELDS. .
WAS THE MERCILESS GLARE OF DEATH.





KRNCH
GNNK
GNNK

SLURK
SHRK
CHNP
CHNP
SHRK
SLRK
CRUNCH
CHRNP
KRNWCH
SHRK
SHRK
HRK
KRNWCH
CHOMP
CHRMP



SHKK
SKRSH
SKRSH
HRF HRF
SKRSH SKRSH
CHOMP CHOMP

CHOMP
CHOMP
SLRRK
CHOMP
SHRK

GLUP GLUP
GLP
GLPP
SLRRK
SLRRK
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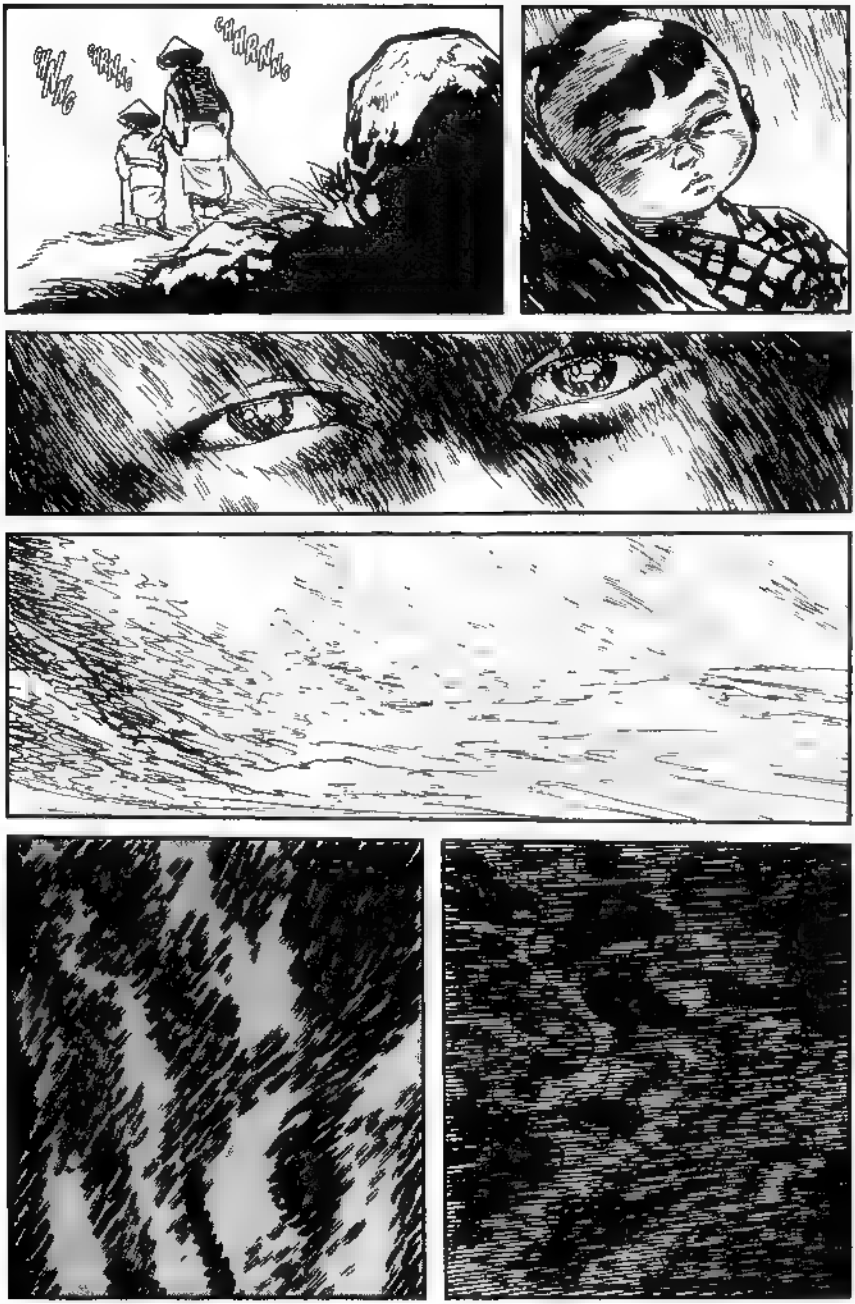
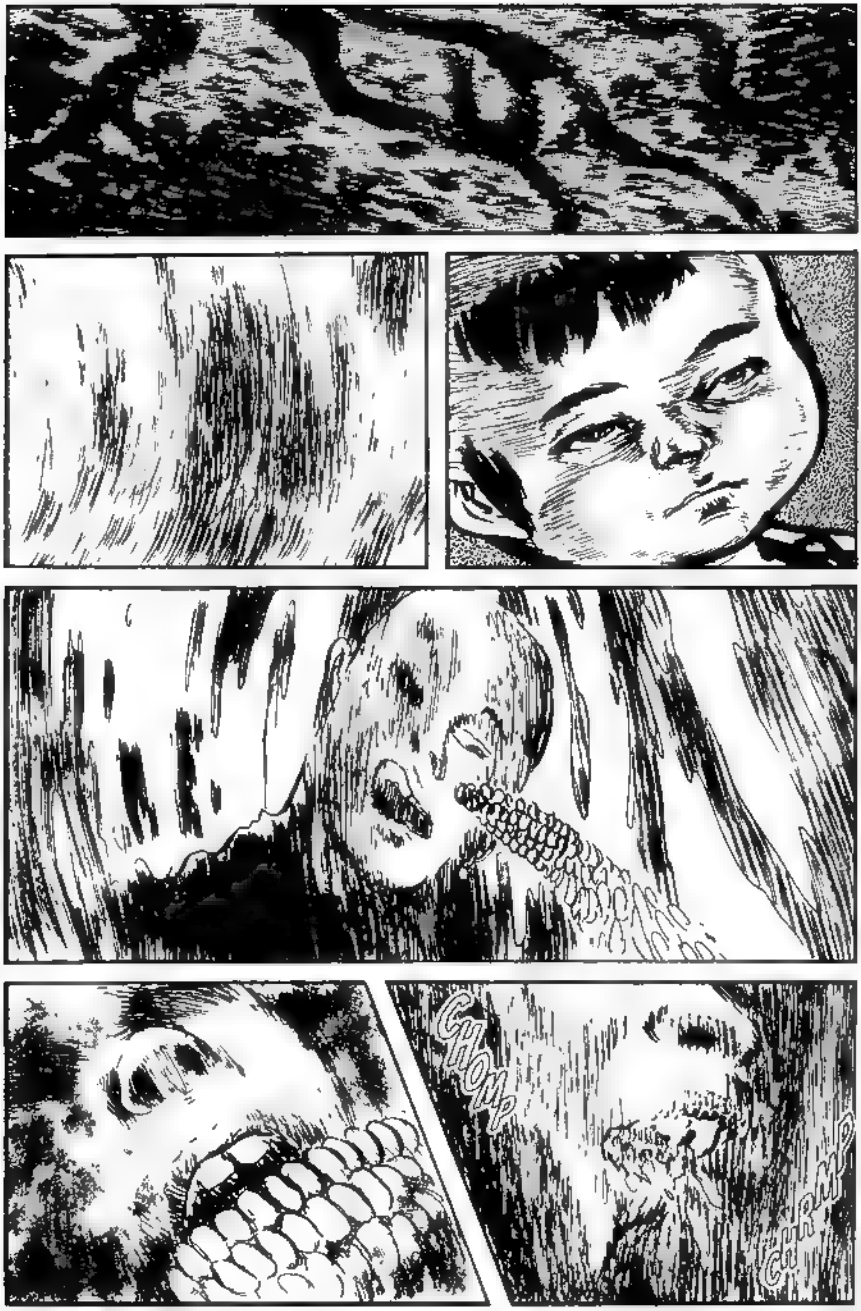
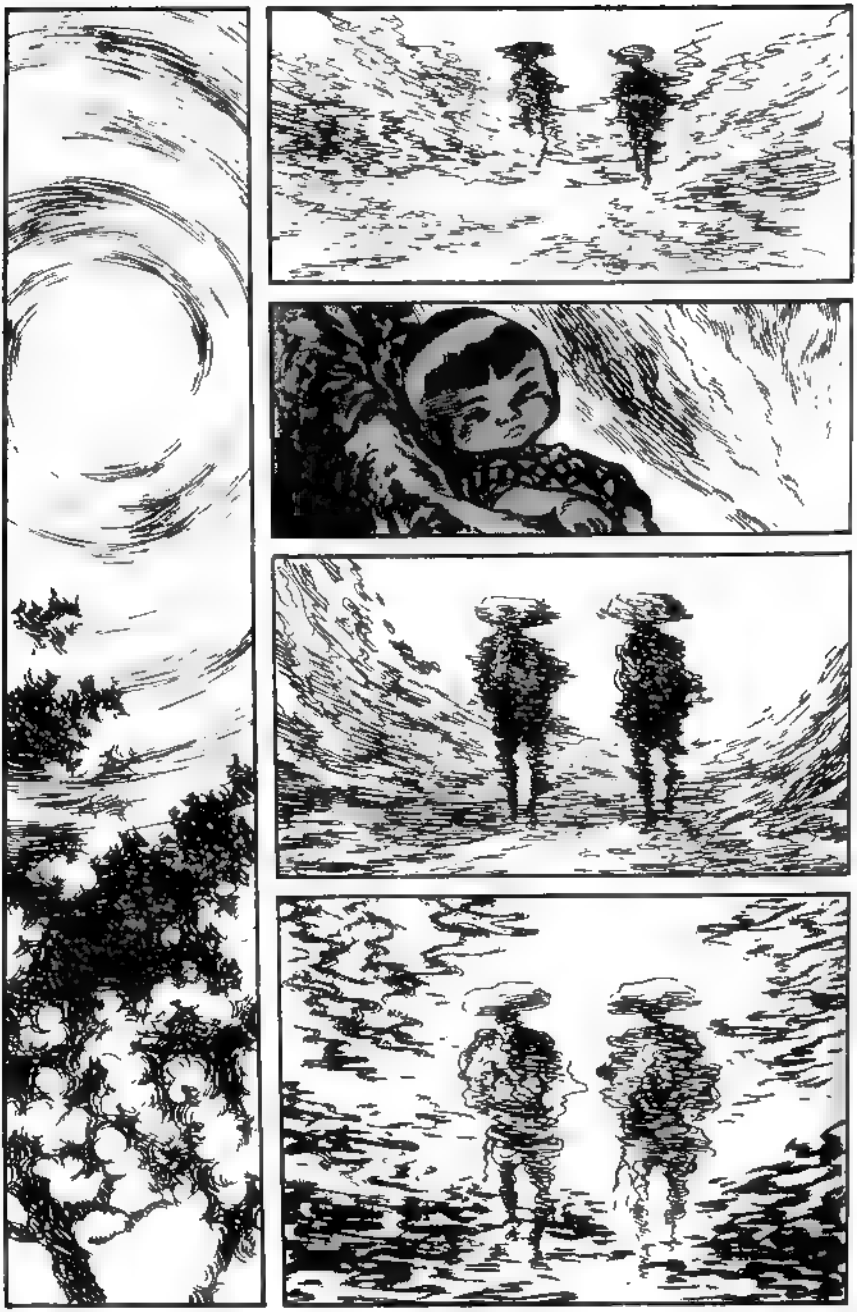
SLRRRP
THPPP
SLRRP



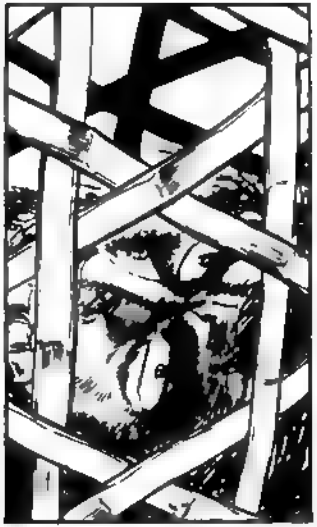

CHOMP
CHOMP

SKRSH
SKRSH
SKRCH
SKRCH
CHAMP
CHOMP
SHRK
SLRRK
CHAMP
CHAMP
SHRK
CHAK
SHRRP
SHRRP
KRNCH
KRNCH
CHOMP
CHM



GUESS IT'S BETTER WITH THE KID THERE.
YOU DON'T FIGURE HE'LL BLAB?
HELL, NO LOOK AT HIM. HE'S HALF DEAD ALREADY
LOST, YOU FIGURE?
THE FUCK I KNOW.
HEY! THEY'RE COMING!

KRRK KRRK
SKSSH
SKSSH
武州無宿
松五郎
*BUSHŪ GANGSTER MATSUGORŌ
SKRTCH
SKTCH
SKSSH



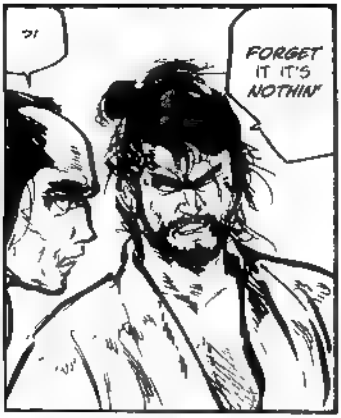
SKUSH!
GYAHH!
UGH!
HIYAHH!
NNGYAH!
THUKKK
GHUFF!
GWOO

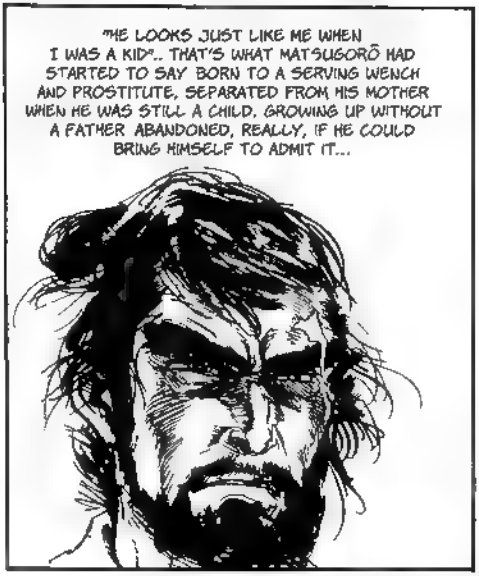
THERE!
STEADY!
RRNG...

BOSS! WE GOTTA MAKE TRACKS...
I KNOW!
BOSS!
SHUDDUP!

BOSS, THERE AIN'T *TIME*
GINJI! CARRY THAT KID ON YOUR BACK.
WH-*WHAT* DID YA SAY?!
WE'RE *TAKIN'* THE *KID!*
B-BOSS, YOU GOTTA BE *KIDDIN'!* WE GOT ALL THE *JITTE-MON* IN THE EIGHT PROVINCES OF KANTŌ BARKING UP OUR ASSES!
A HALF-DEAD STREET KID LIKE THAT.
WHAT THE HELL *FOR...?*
HE'LL BE OUR *STRAW MAN* TO THROW OFF THE *LAW!*
AND IF WE'RE *CORNERED,* WE SAY HE'S OUR *HOSTAGE!*
WE DO OURSELVES UP LIKE NORMAL FOLK TRAVELIN' WITH A *KID,* SEE? NOW WE STICK OUT LIKE SORE THUMBS 'STEAD OF TAKIN' TO THE RIDGE LINES AND THE BACK ROADS, WITH A FRONT MAN WE GO STRAIGHT DOWN THE HIGHWAYS LIKE WE OWN 'EM.
GREAT IDEA!
A STRAW *KID,* HUH.. THAT'S OUR BOSS FOR YA.

IT'S LIKE THAT *DIVINE PROVIDENCE* SHIT, FINDING HIM RIGHT WHERE YOU PLANNED TO SPRING ME.
AND BESIDES...


...?
FORGET IT IT'S NOTHIN'


"HE LOOKS JUST LIKE ME WHEN I WAS A KID".. THAT'S WHAT MATSUGORŌ HAD STARTED TO SAY BORN TO A SERVING WENCH AND PROSTITUTE, SEPARATED FROM HIS MOTHER WHEN HE WAS STILL A CHILD. GROWING UP WITHOUT A FATHER ABANDONED, REALLY, IF HE COULD BRING HIMSELF TO ADMIT IT...

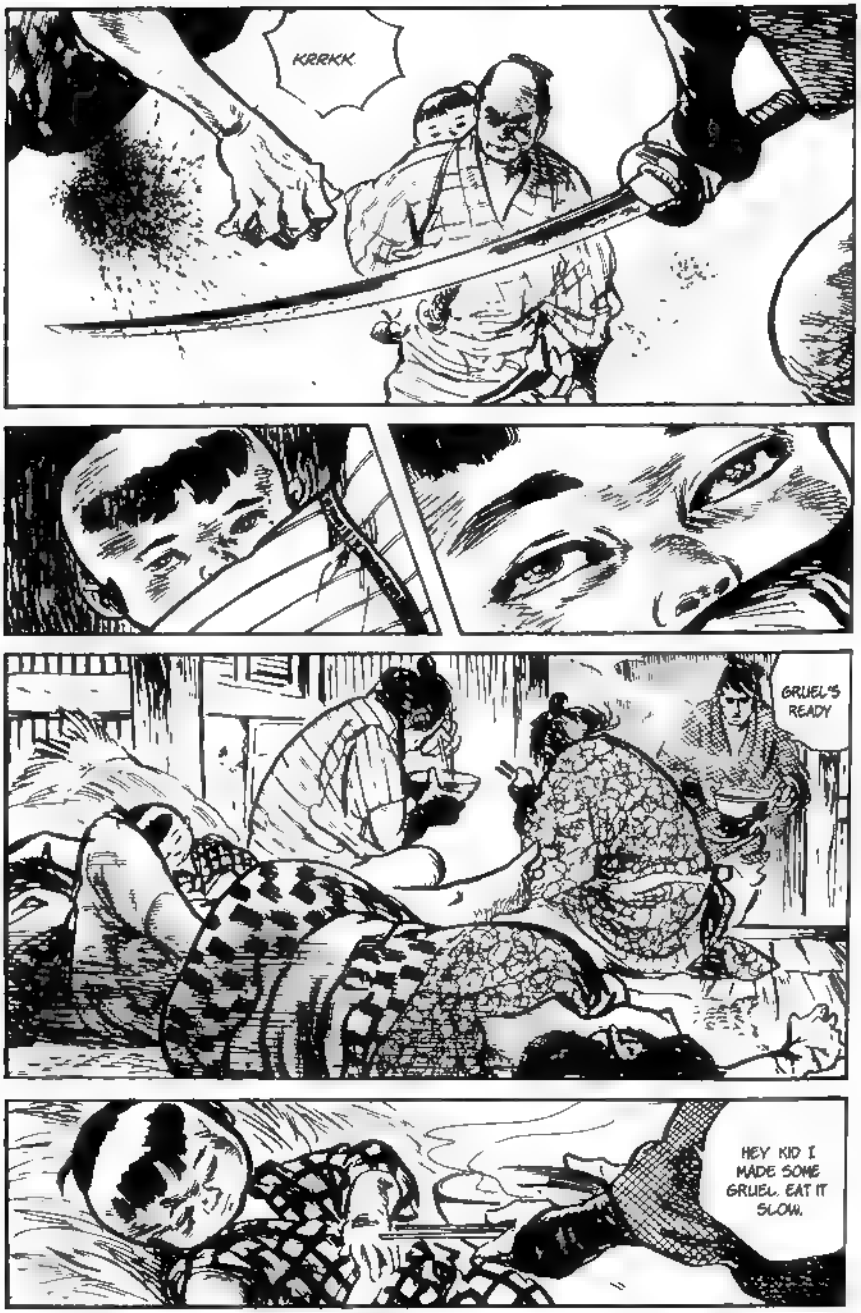
SINCE THOSE DAYS, TWENTY YEARS AND MORE, RIDING A WHIRLWIND OF CRIME.

CIRCLING SLOWLY TO EARTH LIKE A SKITTERING LEAF THAT WAS MATSUGORŌ.

BOSS! THE BRAT'S NEARLY DONE FOR IF WE DON'T GET SOMETHING INTO HIM, HE'LL GIVE UP THE GHOST
IF YOU WANT TO USE HIM, WE BETTER STOP A BIT AND FIX HIM UP
WE CAN GO A FEW DAYS WITHOUT GRUB, BUT
FUCK. GIVE HIM SOME WATER
HERE, KID. DRINK
GLP

TRAVELERS! WE'RE LOST!
OPEN UP!
YOU THE ONLY ONES HERE?
YES SIR, SIR

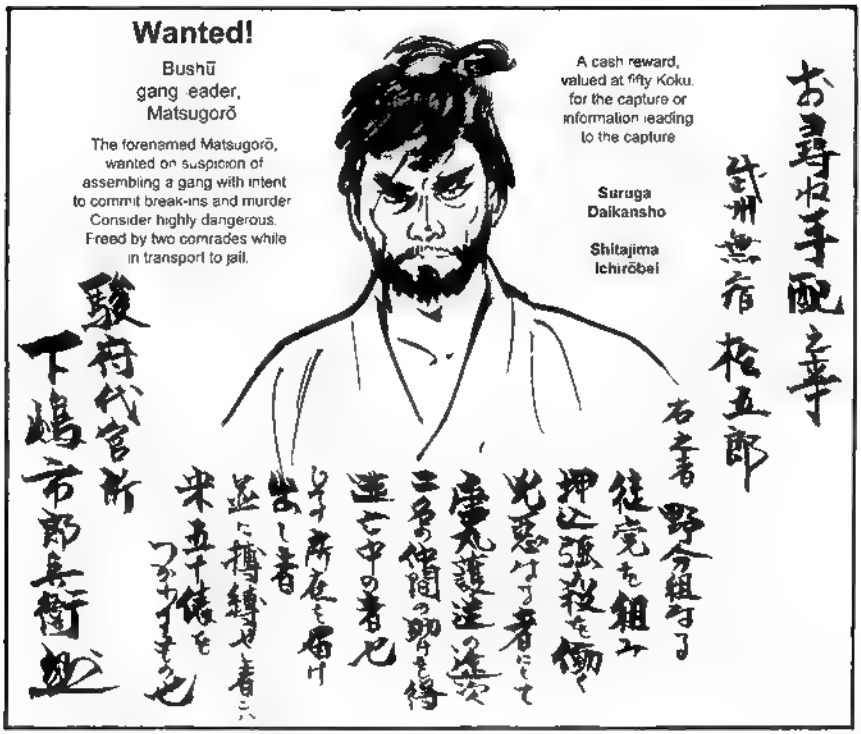
KASH
GYAHHH!
HEEEEK!
YAHH!
SKRASH
IF YA FUCKIN' TALK, THE LAW'LL FIND US TOUGH LUCK!
HEEE!
SKRRRKK
SKUSSH


KRRKK
GRUEL'S READY
HEY KID I MADE SOME GRUEL. EAT IT SLOW.

I SAID EAT!
GRUEL'S BEST FOR YA WHEN YOU'RE HALF-STARVED WE'LL GIVE YOU SOMETHIN' GOOD TOMORROW COME ON!
WEIRD LITTLE BUGGER.
SHIT NEVER THOUGHT I'D SEE THE BOSS FEED A KID
HEH HEH HEH
FUCK OFF! HE'S GONNA WORK HIS BUTT OFF FOR US.
SOME-ONE'S GOTTA DO IT

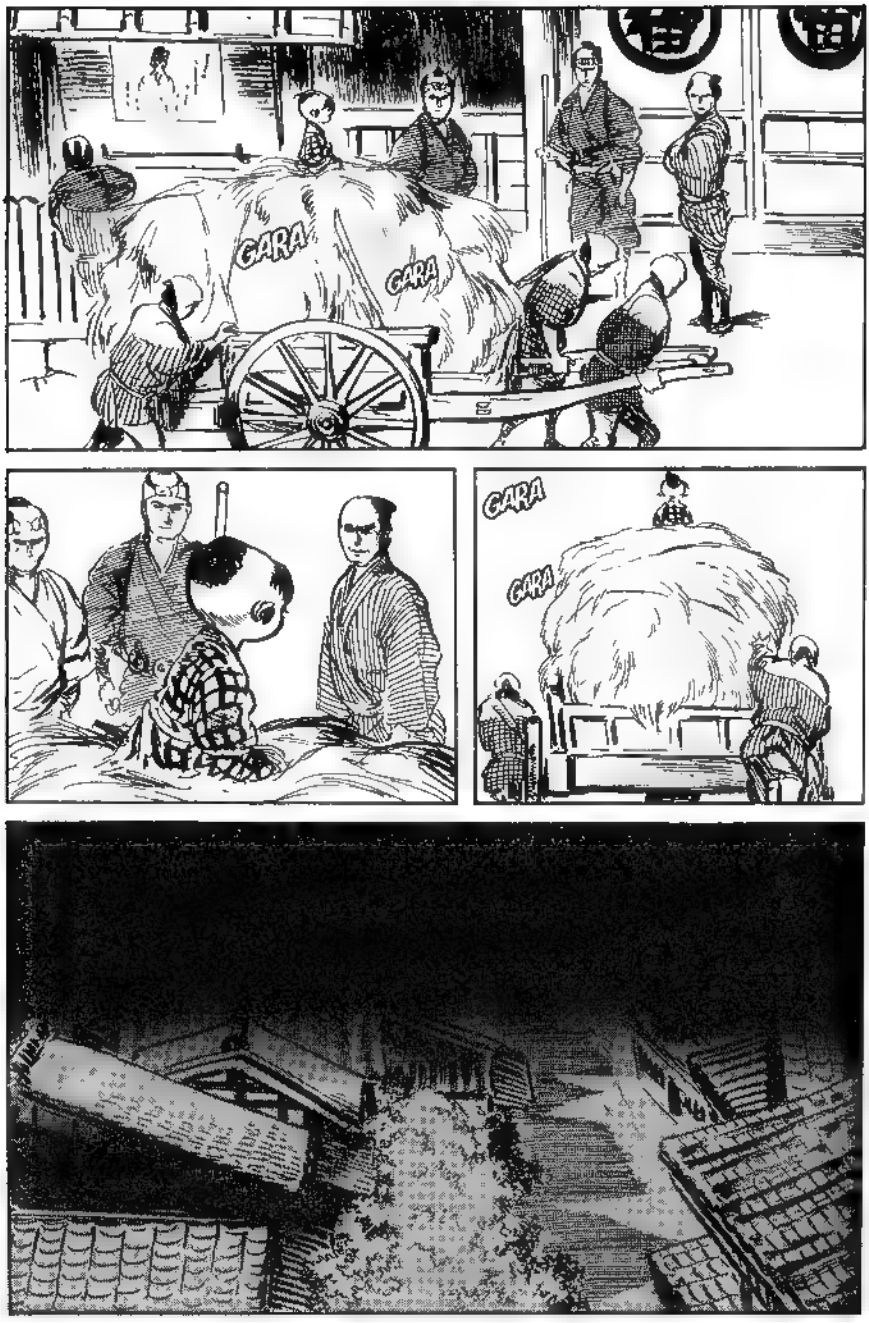
HE SMILED!
WHAT THE FUCK?!
SLRP SLRP
SLRP SLRP
I SAY HE'S GONNA WORK HIS BUTT OFF, AND IT'S LIKE HE'S FUCKIN' BORN AGAIN...?

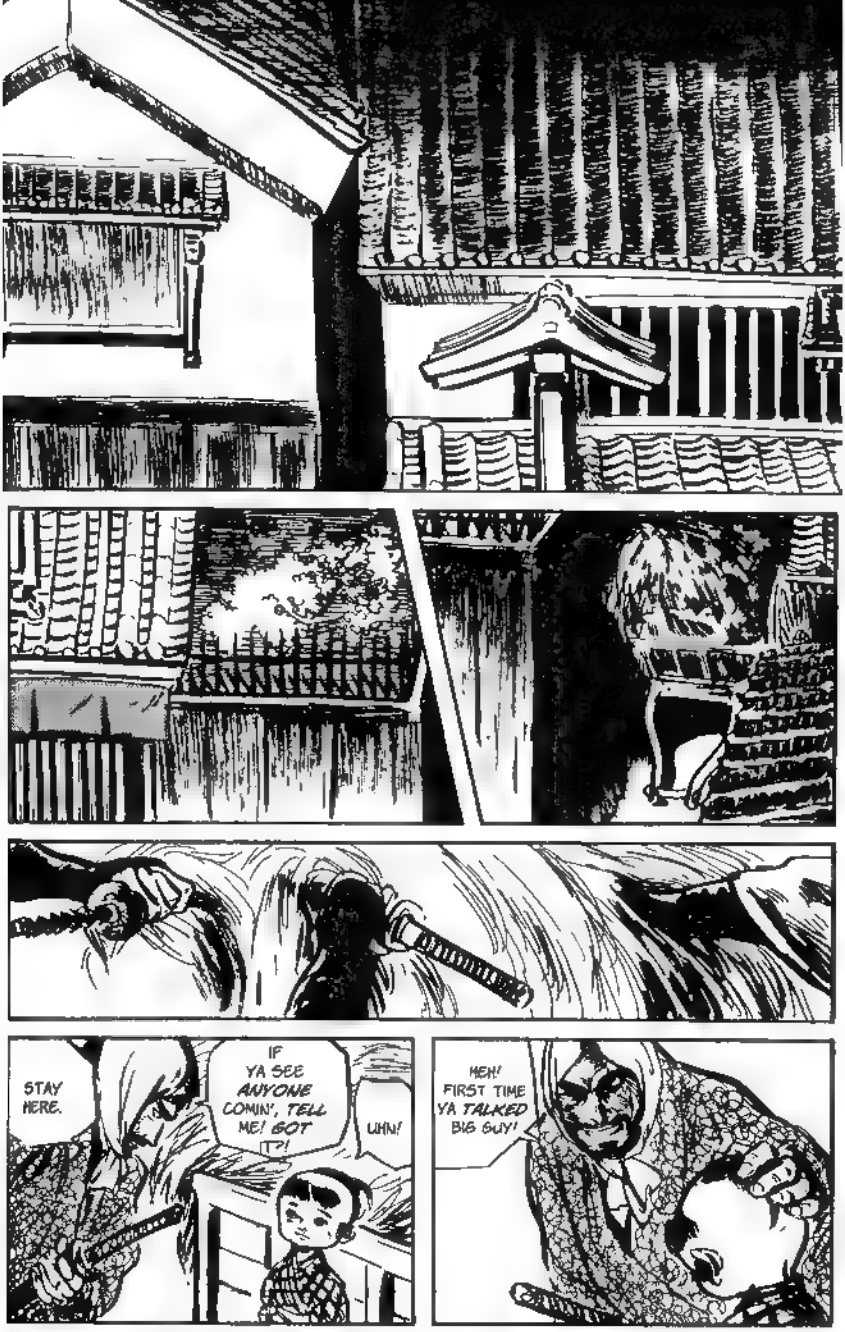
SO, BOSS WHAT DO WE DO NOW?
FIRST, WE MAKE ENOUGH TO LIE LOW FIVE SIX YEARS THEN WE GO TO EARTH AROUND KYOTO
WE GO STRAIGHT, OPEN A BUSINESS OR SOMETHIN' LET THE TALK DIE DOWN.
BUT EVERY WAY-STATION'S CRAWLIN' WITH JITTE' WANTED POSTERS EVERYWHERE
YEAH, WE COULD USE THE LOOT BUT IT'S TOO RISKY
THAT'S WHY WE GOT THE KID!
WE OFF A FEW FOLK, AND GET OUTTA HERE.
SHIT SLEEPING WITH CORPSES
HE'S FUCKIN' FEARLESS..


Wanted!
Bushū
gang eader,
Matsugorō
The forenamed Matsugorō, wanted on suspicion of assembling a gang with intent to commit break-ins and murder Consider highly dangerous. Freed by two comrades while in transport to jail.
A cash reward, valued at fifty Koku. for the capture or information leading to the capture
Suruga
Daikansho
Shitajima
Ichirōbei

*POLICE CHECKPOINT

GARA
GARA
*BAN (GUARD STATION)


GARA
GARA
GARA
GARA


STAY HERE.
IF YA SEE ANYONE COMIN', TELL ME! GOT IT?
UHN!
HEH! FIRST TIME YA TALKED BIG GUY!

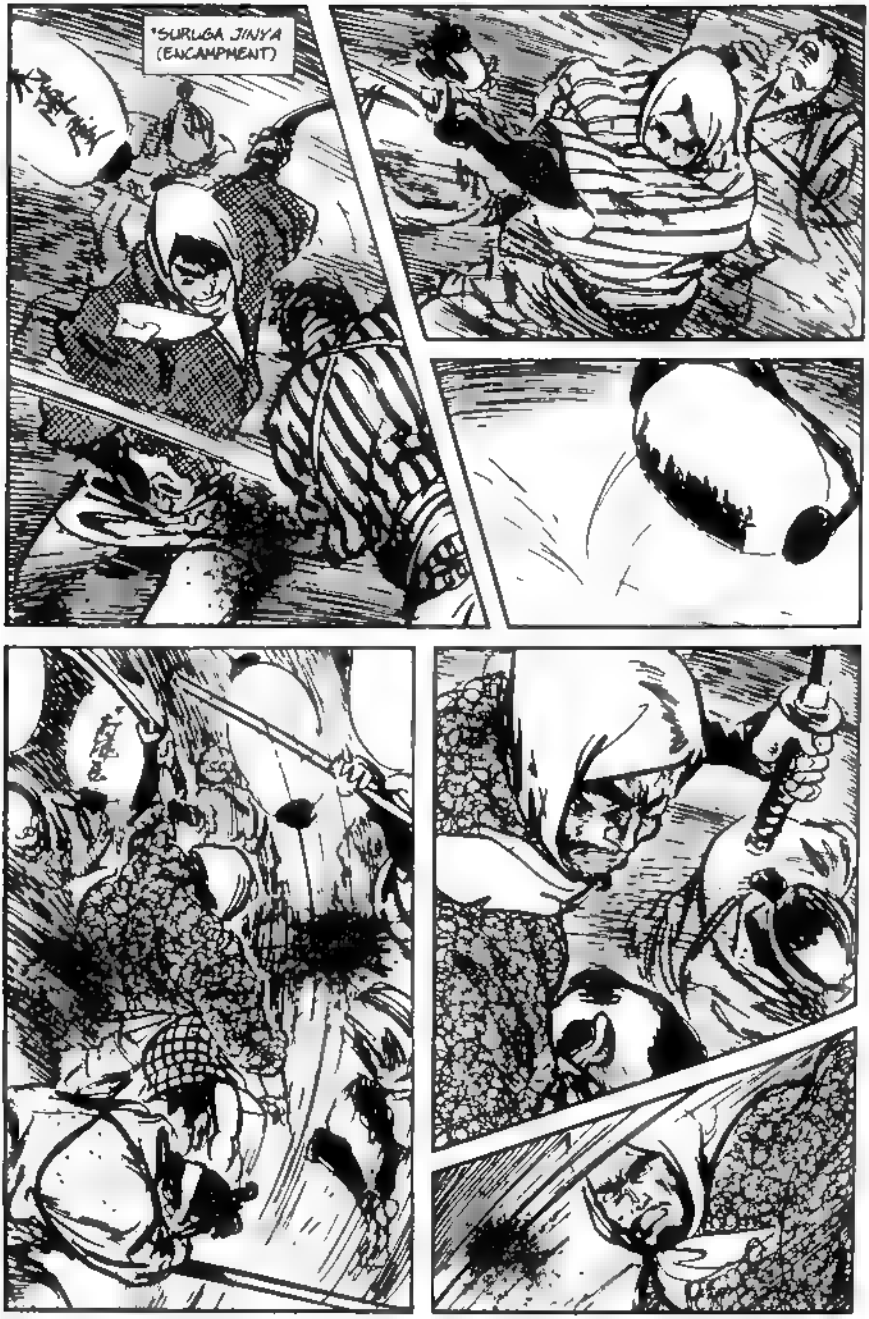
KASHING
CHRING

SHIT!
WE'LL SLIP OUT THE BACK AND FOLLOW THE RIVER
YOU GUYS RUSTLE UP A BOAT!

HUH?

DAMN
WE'RE DEAD MEN
ANYWAY
BUILD A
MOUNTAIN
OF BODIES
BOYS

LAY DOWN YOUR ARMS!
HATSUGORŌ! GO-YŌ!
GO-YŌ!
GO-YŌ!
FUCK! TAKE 'EM!
SKUSSH
SKRSSH


*SURUGA JINYA
(ENCAMPMENT)

SURRENDER!
GO-YŌ!
GO-YŌ!
GO-YŌ!
B- BOSS! USE THE KID!
THREATEN 'EM, BOSS! ONE STEP CLOSER, AND WE DO THE DAMN KID!
BOSS!
HOLD 'EM OFF! WE'LL GET A BOAT!
. . . .
. . . .

FUCK IT ALL!!
NGYAH!
KILL THEM IF YOU HAVE TO!
YAHHHH!

SHUKKK
SRASSSH
GHAT
AHHHH!
HRUH!
HRUH !
KIIK
SHUKKK
THUKKK
HRUH

FUCK IT ALL!!
AGYAH!
KILL THEM IF YOU HAVE TO!
YAHHHH!

SHUKKK
UGUHH!
SRASSSH
GAHH! AHHAJUG!
SHUKK
HRUG KRK
THUKKK
BRUG

THWDD
B. BOSS. WHY ? W-WHY
I. I. DON'T FUCKIN' KNOW...
THD
....
MATSUGORŌ. BUSHŪ GANGSTER

GLOSSARY

bushū
Another term for Musashi, the area encompassing most of the Kantō Plain around modern-day Tokyo

dōtanuki
A battle sword. Literally, "sword that cuts through torsos."

gojō-bako
Lacquered, waterproof box used to carry official correspondence between the shōgunate in Edo and its regional officials

go-yō
Official business. As a lantern carried by the officers of the *daikan* magistrate, the equivalent of today's national police, or as the shout of the police apprehending a criminal, *"go yo"* was one of the most dreaded words in the world of Edo Japan's criminal elements

han
A feudal domain

hanshi
Samurai in the service of a *han*

honorifics
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Lone Wolf and Cub*

dono – archaic, used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures
sama – used for superiors

jitte-mon
A policeman. The street cops of the Edo period carried *jitte*, a specialized weapon about 18 inches long, with no cutting edge – just two prongs designed to catch and snap off an opponent's sword blade

jizō
Local deities, represented by simple stone statues by the roadside. Often decorated with red cloth bibs

Kantō
Literally, "east of the gate." Eastern Japan, north of the mountain chain around Mount Fuji, especially the region around Edo, present-day Tokyo

kenkyaku
Swordsman, *kenshi*

koku
A bale of rice. The traditional measure of a *han*'s wealth, a measure of its agricultural land and productivity

Kyoto shoshidai
The shōgun's emissary to the Imperial Court in Kyoto. Although real power lay with the shōgun in Edo, the shōgunate maintained the fiction that the emperor was the

ultimate authority in Japan. The *shoshidai* maintained contact with the imperial household and the aristocracy, and oversaw tax collection and other *shogunate* business in the old capital.

meifumadō
The Buddhist Hell. The way of demons and damnation.

nagamaki
A two-handed weapon taller than a man, with a long, curved blade.

ri
Old unit of measurement. Approximately 4 kilometers (2.5 miles).

rōnin
A masterless samurai. Literally, "one adrift on the waves." Members of the samurai caste who have lost their masters through the dissolution of *han*, expulsion for misbehavior, or other reasons. Prohibited from working as farmers or merchants under the strict Confucian caste system imposed by the Tokugawa shōgunate, many impoverished *rōnin* became "hired guns" for whom the code of the samurai was nothing but empty words.

sakki
The palpable desire to kill, directed at another person. Sometimes called blood lust. Based on the concept of *ki*, or energy, found in spiritual practices and Japanese martial arts like Aikido. These body energies can be felt beyond the physical self by the trained and self-aware.

sekisho
Checkpoint regulating travel from Edo to other parts of the country. All travelers had to submit papers at official checkpoints along the main highways in and out of Edo.

shinobi
A generic term for ninja, meaning "one who moves in secrecy." Ninja had their heyday in the time of warring states before the rise of the Tokugawa clan. Originally mercenaries serving different warlords, by the Edo period they were in the service of the central government. The most famous *shinobi* were the ninja of Iga and Kaga, north of Kyoto. The Kurokuwa that appear in *Lone Wolf and Cub* were officially the laborers and manual workers in Edo Castle. Whether they truly served as a secret spy corps is lost in history.

yakuza
Japan's criminal syndicates. In the Edo period, *yakuza* were a common part of the landscape, running houses of gambling and prostitution. As long as they did not overstep their bounds, they were tolerated by the authorities, a tradition little changed in modern Japan.

zanbatō
The mythical horse-slicing stroke used by Ōgami Ittō.

KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co creating and writing the successful *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman* manga, Koike has hosted television programs, founded a golf magazine, produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent

Lone Wolf and Cub was first serialized in Japan in 1970 (under the title *Kozure Okami)* in *Manga Action* magazine and continued its hugely popular run for many years, being collected as the stories were published, and reprinted worldwide. Koike collected numerous awards for his work on the series throughout the next decade. Starting in 1972, Koike adapted the popular manga into a series of six films, the *Baby Cart Assassin* saga, garnering widespread commercial success and critical acclaim for his screenwriting

This wasn't Koike's only foray into film and video. In 1996, *Crying Freeman*, the manga Koike created with artist Ryoichi Ikegami, was produced in Hollywood and released to commercial success in Europe and is currently awaiting release in America.

And to give something back to the medium that gave him so much, Koike started the *Gekiga Sonjuku*, a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists — such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi — break into the comics field

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

GOSEKI KOJIMA

Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. While just out of junior high school, the self-taught Kojima began painting advertising posters for movie theaters to pay his bills.

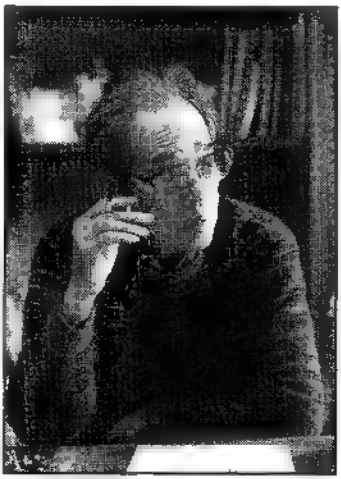
In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai*, or "paper play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays. Kojima moved on to creating works for the *kashi bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers. He soon became highly popular among *kashi-bon* readers.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his series *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami* (*Lone Wolf and Cub*). Before long the story had become a gigantic hit, eventually spinning off a television series, six motion pictures, and even theme-song records. Koike and Kojima were soon dubbed the "golden duo" and produced success after success on their way to the pinnacle of the manga world.

When *Manga Japan* magazine was launched in 1994, Kojima was asked to serve as consultant, and he helped train the next generation of manga artists.

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of 71.



THE RONIN REPORT

by Tim Ervin-Gore

Lone Wolf and Cub in Film, Part 1

Sword of Vengeance

Note: this is not a review, but a discussion piece. If you haven't seen this movie yet, read only the first two paragraphs. The rest might spoil your movie watching experience.

As *Lone Wolf and Cub* swept Japan in a wave of black-ink blood, a series of films and television programs followed closely in its tide. While the manga these were based on is indisputably a masterpiece, not all of the live-action adaptations were as great. Only two years after the manga

began its serialization, the first of a six-movie set, known as the "Baby Cart" series, hit the screens in Japan. These films were the cream of the *Lone Wolf* crop, with screenplays by creator Kazuo Koike, graceful direction by Kenji Misumi, consistent acting by Wakayama Tomisaburo as Ogami Itto, and a well-cast Akihiro Tomikawa as Daigoro. Amazingly, the six films in the series were produced within a five-year time frame. Kojima's scripts, cut-and-pasted packages of important elements and pertinent scenes from the manga, form a condensed universe of Ogami's Japan. Visually, the comic book translates easily to the director's eye, owing to artist Goseki Kojima's cinematic style. *Lone Wolf and Cub* reads like a monument to film, with repeating frames, extremely graceful timing, and similar framing compositions and patterns.

Though comic books and film share many aesthetic similarities, it is difficult to successfully adapt a comic book to film, as it usually involves significant trimming and changing the plot to fit the short attention span of movie watchers, who expect to be engaged by an entire story within two hours. Conversely, comics readers often desire lengthy narratives to justify the cover price (or at least they should). That said, the film adaptations of the "Baby Cart" series were up against tough odds, but they turned out to be pretty darn good. This is at least partly attributed to the amount of film afforded by its serialization. But certainly, the films themselves stand on their own and hand-feed the viewer a serious dose of drama, honor, beauty, and profuse, squirting blood.

The first film in the series, *Sword of Vengeance* (the pre-translated Japanese title is closer to "Son for Hire, Sword for Hire"), starts in a very respectful manner,

with the beheading of the young lord from the manga story "The White Path Between the Rivers." From the first moment, the avid reader will notice how well the movie was put together. The sets are lovingly recreated, the pace and emotion fits the original text, and many of the characters are faithfully depicted. However, in an abrupt departure, a retainer of the young lord, not Ogami, as in the original story, tenderly instructs him on the ceremonial placement of the fan against his abdomen. With one minor plot modification, the ironic juxtaposition of tenderness and violence that is central to Ogami's character is lost. The overall theme of Ogami's inner conflict, with everyone he respects questioning his path and being cut down in the process, is central to the book's story. This deletion affects the viewer's perception. Ogami comes across more as a heartless servant of an evil master. This sentiment continues throughout the movie as Wakayama

Tomisaburo, playing a scruffy and stoic Ogami, travels the byways of feudal Japan. In a short period of contextual narration, the shogunate takes the center stage to become the evil organization with Retsudo Yagyu at the helm. Then, in keeping with Koike's narrative style, the story breaks to the present, as Ogami and Daigoro wander the countryside together, pushing an excellent reconstruction of the infamous baby cart, complete with spring-loaded pole arms and "son for hire, sword for hire" flag. The countryside scenery is captivating, the music is emotionally moving, and a terribly rough samurai with his incredibly darling son are rolling across the lush landscape. Koike took the time to include a scene where Daigoro suckles at the breast of an unknown woman, but damn the limits of film for reducing the context of that breast to a crazy woman in the street. For some reason, having the breast belong to a fighting sister of a Yakuza clan

("Baby Cart on the River Styx," Vol. 1) made the scene in the comic book more resonant. Still, this is an important cue to Ogami's logical tenderness, and it's a good thing that Koike kept this detail in the film. The pace of the film is contemplative, maybe too much for American audiences, but fans of *Lone Wolf and Cub*'s somber gait might appreciate the breathing room. This slow movement shows respect for time, and the scattered sword battles in the film seem more urgent in comparison.

Like the comic book, the story flashes back periodically, but the only clues to the switch seem to be costume and set changes. For the non-reader, this could make it seem like Ogami is dressed as a bum during the day, then cleaning up and going home at night. This is due in part to another deviation from the original story. In the part of the movie that would

encompass the story "The White Path Between the Rivers," Daigoro is an infant when his mother is cut down by the Ura-Yagyu. Though it's understandable that a director would accelerate Daigoro's age to bridge the book's time gap, it takes longer to perceive the flashback effect. Fortunately, this is easy to overlook. As for the rest of this important, contextual chunk of movie, the details are exquisite. The priest bells carried by the Yagyu ninja have a terrifying ring, the *ihai* set-up is arranged with precision, and the setting of the river duel is picture-perfect, as if that very location was the inspiration for Kojima's art.

Technically, the movie is superb. The atmosphere is airy and tense, and the camera movements lend generously to the tone of the story. The sword fights are brief and violent, with gallons of projectile blood squirting off in every direction, a fitting testimony

to Kojima's intense storyboards. The bloodshed is ample, and some of the special effects are remarkable. At one point a man slowly separates into halves after a decisive stroke by Wakayama's Ogami. In some ways, the distracting gore makes up for a lack of sword skill by some of the actors; it would be difficult for all of the actors to wield swords and spears with the idealized grace of Kojima's panels. But after watching a gaggle of Hong Kong sword movies, you might feel slighted by the choreography in *Sword of Vengeance*. Another observable oddity occurs in the film's soundtrack. In a few scenes that take place during one hell of a rainstorm, the audio drops when the dialogue pauses, as if it's only raining when someone is speaking. This was likely done to reduce the overall noise, but the attenuation is very dramatic and comes off sounding absurd and unnatural.

As the backing plot for this film, Ogami is hired to infiltrate a gang of ronin and kill a corrupt lord. At this point, the story "Wings to the Bird, Fangs to the Beast" (Vol. 1) smoothly converges with the general plot. Again, the movie remains faithful to Kojima's art: the setting of the bath town is exquisite; the people cast as the prisoners to the gang of ruffians are perfectly attired and act their parts like they're reading from the book; the honorable, defiant, public sex scene is left intact, and provides the director with another of at least three opportunities to expose a woman's breasts. And, let's be blunt here for a moment, despite its wrappings of honor and skill and humanity and corruption, *Lone Wolf and Cub* also uses liberal amounts of violence and sexiness to drive interest in the story, and the film uses the same elements to entertain and engage.

In some ways, moving pictures can tease out new elements and angles, and bring a greater context to a preexisting story. When done right, comics-to-film adaptations (and vice versa) can turn out great. Unfortunately, often one medium can't afford to adapt fully to the other, but the "Baby Cart" series is a fine example of doing it right — well, at least so far. This is just the first film of the six-film series, and there are five more to watch. But since the films were all created in such a short period of time, there's a good chance they'll share similar production qualities. At any rate, for the dedicated *Lone Wolf and Cub* reader, it's simply a delight to see elements of these great stories depicted so well on film, and for those who study popular media in general, the "Baby Cart" series is both a successful comics-to-film transfer, and an exhibit of the similarities between the two.